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BUSES

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GREEN ROUTEMASTER OF RENOWN

Eastbourne challenger revives Southdown livery

- French buy Dunn-Line
- North Wales independents
- New Dart is revealed
- Manchester Metroshuttle

Ian Allan

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BUSES

VOLUME 58 NO 614 MAY 2006

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ANDREW JAROSZ

BUSES THAT ARE REALLY ON TRACK

These are promising times for buses in two starkly different English urban areas.

Fastrack buses are providing the first of two dedicated routes for the growing Thames Gateway communities of north Kent, where homes are being built around the fast Channel Tunnel rail link into London. And First's much heralded 'ftr' service will transform a cross-city route in historic York from 8 May.

The Wright-bodied Volvo buses on these routes are well above the standard of your typical urban vehicle. Distinctively liveried single-deckers for Fastrack, tram-like StreetCars for 'ftr'.

But what really sets these two schemes apart is their promoters' packaging together a service that, in the words of First's 'Mrs FTR', Barbara Bedford, should be 'irresistable' to car users for some of their needs. This is rapid transit with everything but rails and wires. There are stylish waiting areas that stand comparison with the best European tramways. Reserved tracks and traffic light priorities.

Real-time information removes the uncertainty of when or whether the next service arrives. Vehicle and highway engineers believe they have made the York 'ftr' as smooth and quiet as a tram. The council — which has embraced the project with infectious zeal — has even resurfaced a key section of road.

And ticketing — including self-service machines on the York StreetCars — addresses the needs of an affluent society in which text messaging and electronic payment is becoming the norm.

Consider just two measures that reach out to the non-bus riding community. On Fastrack, homes equipped with 'next bus' information. In York, that information will be relayed to mobile phones so people can wait in a pub or café rather than stand in the elements at the stop. These are quantum leaps for UK bus travel. It recognises the attractions of the car and offers a solution that might sometimes be better.

Ironically, one of First York's biggest initial challenges won't just be to win over new customers, but to reassure existing riders that the new service will be better, that they really will be able to use self-service ticket machines instead of paying the driver. And that the £300,000 StreetCars will go to most of the same places at the same time as the humble buses they replace.

It is too easy to be cynical about neither scheme being promoted as a bus or to mock First's decision to call its StreetCar drivers 'pilots'. But we shouldn't. These services must appeal to those who never travel by 'bus' but happily use park-&-ride or shuttles that airports choose to glamourise by calling 'coaches'.

Neither initiative should divert the bus industry from the vast majority of humdrum bus services. The ones that rely on vehicles that remind their lost passengers of school travel 20 years ago. The ones that fight a losing battle for scarce road space. That have complicated fares scales and timetables less penetrable than ancient Sanskrit. They deserve to gain the best elements of these flagship projects.

But if Fastrack and 'ftr' succeed in altering urban lifestyles, we could be on the brink of a true public transport revolution. One that the bus — whatever its promoters choose to call it — has a life enhancing role to play.

ALAN MILLAR

REMEMBER THE EDITOR'S NEW ADDRESS

Don't forget that the *Buses* editorial office has moved from Glasgow to the east of Scotland.

The new postal address to contact the editor or to send in any photographs, articles or letters for the magazine is ***Buses*, PO Box 14644, Leven, KY9 1WX.** The new phone number is **01333 340637** and the new fax number is **01333 340608**. The e-mail address remains **buseseditor@btconnect.com**.

Mail sent to the Glasgow address will be forwarded in the short term, but please amend your records now as Royal Mail advises that its policy is only to redirect mail from a PO Box for a maximum of **six months**. Mail sent there after **June** is likely to be returned to senders.

Cover picture: Cavendish Motor Services is appealing to lovers of Sussex nostalgia by reviving traditional Southdown colours for its new services in Eastbourne. It uses Dennis Darts on most journeys, supplemented by immaculate ex-London Routemaster RML2324. TERRY BLACKMAN

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FRENCH GIANT BUYS DUNN-LINE IN £9.7M TAKEOVER

The rapid consolidation of the UK bus industry into the control of large multi-national groups has taken another dramatic step with Veolia Transport — the French giant that previously traded as Connex — paying £9.7million for Nottingham-based Dunn-Line.

The deal adds over 200 buses and coaches — operated mainly on long-term contracts with National Express Coaches, local authorities and commercial customers — to Veolia's growing UK bus business. It follows its purchase last year (News December) of South Wales independent Bebb Travel, which at the time ran 39 vehicles on local authority and National Express contracts.

It also all but ends the UK operating industry's brief flirtation with the Alternative Investment Market, the mini stock market for smaller businesses seeking access to City investors' funds, which Dunn-Line joined in 2004. Only the Tellings-Golden Miller Group remains listed on AIM, Southern Vectis having sold out to Go-Ahead and 2 Travel Group having been expelled before going out of business.

In the year to 30 November, Dunn-Line made a pre-tax profit of £1.5million on £13.8million turnover, a margin of 10.9%. Since being listed on AIM, it took over Mass Transit's Lincoln operation and Hull-based Alpha Travel, which also has a base in Lancashire for a BAE Systems contract. And it sold Flights of Birmingham to Centra, which has since sold most of its business to the current Flights Hallmark undertaking.

Chief executive Bob Dunn, who founded the business in 1984 with his wife Carol, is staying on as a non-executive director with a brief to help Veolia with further expansion plans. His eldest son, operations director Scott Dunn, has become managing director, reporting to Veolia chief operating officer Steve McAleavy, who left his previous post as Metroline managing director last summer. He was with National Express Coaches before joining Metroline in 2002.

Bob Dunn has been in the industry since leaving school 36 years ago, working successively for the National Bus Company, Skills of Nottingham and United Transport in Kenya. He and his wife created Dunn-Line out of Netherfield Coaches, a 10-vehicle business on the verge of going into receivership. Several subsequent purchases have also been of businesses sold in straitened circumstances. Dunn-Line bought Durham Travel Services' coach and open-top sightseeing operations from the receiver and took Uttoxeter-based Stevensons' Coaches off Arriva's hands in 2000, when it no longer fitted its business model. It has also gone through bouts of rationalisation, selling the Stevensons' business as well as Flights.

The Veolia deal values Dunn-Line at 26.8% more than AIM investors' valuation of it over the previous 12 months and provides Dunn family members with around £6.5million for their shareholding. Bob Dunn says Veolia shares his vision of how the business should develop. 'As part of Veolia Transport, we will be able to realise our ambitions for Dunn-Line and offer everyone in the company the chance to continue to enjoy a secure and successful future,' he says.

Although Veolia remains a comparatively small UK transport operator, the French giant operates in 25 countries across five continents and made a £78.6million profit on £4.4billion turnover. It bought National Express's train and tram operations in Melbourne, Australia and last year paid £53million for NatEx's United States transit bus operations. It wants to grow bigger in the UK, partly by more acquisitions and by returning to train operations, but also is in discussions with Nexus (Tyne & Wear) and South Yorkshire PTEs over their proposals for franchised bus services operated under the government's quality contract framework.

Its expansion comes against City speculation over the future independence of major groups like National Express and Go-Ahead.

Right: Typical of the sort of contract work that Dunn-Line and Veolia want to develop is The Bridgford Link around West Bridgford, operated by MCV Evolution-bodied MAN 14.220 AE05 EVB. DALE TRINGHAM

Above: Recent additions to Dunn-Line's contract bus fleet include G384 EKA, an East Lancs EL2000-bodied Dennis Falcon from Arriva Midlands. DANIEL STAZICKER

Below: First visible sign of Dunn-Line's recent takeover of Alpha Coaches was its transfer of seven MCW Metrobuses, including ex-London C398 BUV, to Hull to replace Leyland Atlanteans and Olympians. They have Alpha fleetnames on Dunn-Line livery. DAVID LONGBOTTOM

NATIONAL FREE TRAVEL FOR ENGLAND IN 2008

The government has agreed to introduce an England-wide free travel scheme for over-60s and disabled bus passengers in April 2008.

Chancellor Gordon Brown announced the change in his March budget, days before free travel became available within English local authority or PTE areas from 1 April. The limitations of that scheme have been criticised in some areas. A *Buses* reader in South Cambridgeshire says he cannot travel into any town as such shopping centres as Cambridge, Haverhill and Royston all are in surrounding councils' territories. Free bus travel has been available throughout Wales since the scheme was introduced there in 2002 and the area scheme in Scotland went national on 1 April.

OFT REFERS STAGECOACH/CITYLINK MERGER

Stagecoach's recent burst of takeovers and mergers has once again excited the competition authorities. The Office of Fair Trading has asked the Competition Commission to investigate the merger of Stagecoach and Scottish Citylink's express services into a joint venture owned 35% by Stagecoach, 65% by ComfortDelGro's Citylink. It has also still to rule out referring the takeover of Traction Group to the commission.

The OFT, which referred far more Stagecoach acquisitions in the 1990s to the then Monopolies & Mergers Commission than those by any other emerging group, wants the Competition Commission to investigate whether the joint venture will result in a 'substantial lessening of competition in the market for the supply of scheduled long-distance coach services in Scotland'. It is expected to report its findings by 29 August.

Expressing the group's surprise and disappointment, Tom Wileman — managing director of the Megabus/Citylink joint venture — suggests that the OFT has asked the wrong question. 'We are confident that when the commission looks at the issue in detail, it will realise that the main competition to the coach is inter-city rail services run by First ScotRail,' he says. 'First ScotRail is operated by FirstGroup, which is the dominant bus and rail operator in Scotland, with an almost 70% share of public transport revenues. The improvements made by our inter-city coach joint venture have marked the return of the coach as a real alternative to the train in Scotland.'

Despite the reference, the joint venture is launching a new twice-daily Edinburgh-London Megabus.com service via Newcastle and Sheffield, with feeder connections to/from Ferrytoll Park-&-Ride in Fife. And Stagecoach is expanding Megabus in England and Wales, with a twice-daily Cwmbran-Bristol-London service and additional journeys between Bournemouth, Southampton, Portsmouth and London.

Stagecoach says it has provided the OFT with standard information on its purchase of Traction Group last December. We understand that it cleared a recent decision to close the former Yorkshire Traction central engineering workshops with the OFT, and sources suggest that the OFT is looking specifically at the potential dominance of Stagecoach in Perthshire following the addition of Strathtay to its existing Bluebird operations there and similarly in Grimsby where it already owned Grimsby-Cleethorpes Transport.

Pending OFT clearance, Stagecoach Lincolnshire suspended repainting of ex-Road Car buses into corporate colours and continued to use Road Car rather than Stagecoach national fleetnumbers.

Right: The joint venture replaced the two operators' 20min Edinburgh-Glasgow services with a single service every 15min. Part of the service is provided by Park's of Hamilton, which is introducing 10 of these new 12.8m Plaxton Panther-bodied Volvo B12Ms with centre side wheelchair lifts. KEITH McGILLIVRAY

Top left: Corporate fleetnames have begun to replace Yorkshire Traction fleetnames on acquired vehicles like Northern Counties Paladin-bodied Dennis Dart 32932 (N108 CET), which also carries YT fleetnumber 448. DANIEL STAZICKER

Bottom left: There isn't yet a trace of Stagecoach ownership on six new Wright Eclipse Gemini-bodied Volvo B7TLs ordered by Road Car for Coastal Connect-branded Lincoln-Skegness services. This is 16940 (FX06 AOB). ANDREW JAROSZ

SKIRMISHES AS BIG GROUPS DEFEND THEIR TERRITORY

Stagecoach, First and Arriva have become involved in territorial battles in south-west and north-west England.

In Devon, Stagecoach registered two new commercial services to start from 19 March in place of Devon County Council-supported services operated by First. New service 51 (Exeter-Okehampton) went ahead, but Stagecoach cancelled its registration for an Exeter-Barnstaple service deep into First's North Devon territory to replace route 315. First instead registered registered the 315 commercially, but Stagecoach now plans to start three-times daily service X55 between Exeter and Barnstaple from 30 May, operating via Tiverton and South Molton, while the 315 serves Crediton and Torrington.

Stagecoach opened another competitive front against First on 10 April, by introducing two-hourly commercial service 152 between Seaton and Lyme Regis, with four return trips extending to Bridport and West Bay. The 52min route covers part of First's two-hourly X53 (Exeter-Weymouth-Bournemouth), operated with Devon and Dorset County Council support. And from 1 May, Stagecoach Devon Explorer tickets are valid on all Western Greyhound routes in Cornwall, which connect with Stagecoach in Plymouth.

In Bolton, Arriva North West has registered new 10min service 501 to Moss Bank Way from 29 May, duplicating half of First's busy cross-town 501. This follows First's introduction of new Overground route 534 to Oldhams Estate in competition with Arriva (News March).

■ Stagecoach Manchester is increasing day and night frequencies and introducing more low-floor buses on to route 192 (Manchester-Hazel Grove), where it faces increasing competition from UK North's GM Buses operation.

SOUTHDOWN LOOK IS HOWARD'S WAY BACK TO EASTBOURNE

Former Eastbourne Buses managing director David Howard has returned to the East Sussex town to compete against his former employer with buses painted in traditional Southdown apple green and cream.

Cavendish Motor Services shares the same registered address in Bexhill-on-Sea as Renown Coaches. It began operating hourly cross-town services 10 (Crumbles-Central Avenue) and 11 (Hailsham-Central Avenue) on 13 March, providing a combined half-hourly service between the Seaside and Old Town. The 10 operates between 08.20 and 17.42 on weekdays only, the 11 between 07.45 and 17.32 on weekdays and hourly between 07.45 and 17.18 on Saturdays.

It provides the main service with low-floor ex-Metroline Dennis Darts, but has been operating an ex-Arriva Routemaster — one of the last of the type to run on London route 159 on 9 December — on the Saturday service. The 41-year-old Routemaster also has been repainted in Southdown colours. Cavendish promotes the services as The Lighthouse Line and is using the green livery to highlight the environmental benefits of riding by bus. As an introductory offer, it charged £1 flat fares until 31 March.

Above: RML2324 (CUV 324C) at Langley on 18 March, its first day in service with Cavendish. Pictures by GEOFF RIXON

Eastbourne Buses, in which Anglo-French transport group Keolis has a minority shareholding, has responded by rebranding its routes 1 and 1A (Shinewater-Hamlands via Seaside and Old Town) as The Cavendish Connection and has applied this branding to most of its 10 Optare Excels.

David Howard was managing director at Eastbourne until 1999, when he became director of public transport in the Isle of Man, a post he left at the turn of the year to start this new venture.

Below: Cavendish 227 (R117 RLY), one of three ex-Metroline Dennis Dart SLFs with Plaxton Pointer bodies, at Stone Cross.

Below: Cavendish Line branding on Eastbourne Buses 39 (R207 DKC), an Optare Excel new to Cardiff Bus and acquired from Reading Buses.

CONNECT BRANDING BOOSTS NORTHANTS SERVICES

Funding from Northamptonshire County Council has led Stagecoach East to increase frequencies, reduce fares and rebrand its Kettering and Wellingborough networks.

It launched its new Kettering Connect services on 13 March with 12 council-funded Optare Solos painted in a dedicated two-tone green livery, and raised kerbs at key stops. Services have been simplified and, in one case, doubled in frequency, while fares are up to 10% cheaper.

More green Solos are deployed on routes in Wellingborough, where the launch of Connect branding on 3 April coincided with the introduction of 12 new Alexander Dennis Trident low-floor double-deckers. They are being used to upgrade service X46 (Raunds-Northampton), which together with route X4 provides a 15min service between Wellingborough and Northampton. The X4 service to Milton Keynes has been doubled to half-hourly on Mondays to Saturdays, hourly on Sundays.

Northamptonshire has also introduced a £1 county-wide (except East Northants) flat fare for over-60s and disabled passengers to complement free travel available within district and borough boundaries from 1 April.

QUALITY BUS RAPID TRANSIT COMES TO KENT

The first stage of Kent Thameside's ambitious bus rapid transit system was launched in late March when Arriva began operating dedicated Fastrack-branded buses on new route B between Dartford, Bluewater shopping centre and Gravesend.

The major features of the 15km long route in its 5.5km showcase section between Dartford and Bluewater include nearly 4km of newly built dedicated busway with additional bus-only lanes on other parts of this section. Buses run every 10min in the daytime, half-hourly in evenings and on Sundays.

Already work has begun on the second phase of Fastrack, which is planned to reach a total length of 40km. This will be route A and is an integral part of The Bridge project, a mixed housing and industrial development on derelict land near the Dartford road bridge. The government has announced a grant of £14.6million for this, bringing total Fastrack funding from Kent County Council and government sources to over £34million.

Some sections of busway run alongside existing roads, but a major feature is a long section of dedicated road descending directly and dramatically into the bus station at Bluewater. Environmental intrusion has been minimised by providing a slim bridge over this road to enable the nocturnal dormouse to travel safely between treetops on both sides.

Buses for route B are 14 Wright Eclipse Urban-bodied Volvo B7RLE 40-seaters fitted with particulate traps. Kent has bought them with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and is leasing them to Arriva. They carry a distinctive two-tone blue and silver-grey livery, and seats are upholstered in a mainly blue moquette with the Fastback logo embroidered into the headrests. Drivers also wear Fastrack badges. Buses have three tip-up seats which – to avoid potential accident claims – remain down unless deliberately raised. An unusual feature on the offside is three rows of seats, which are actually individual ones paired but with a wider space between each, presumably for larger passengers.

Twelve more buses are on order for route A, which will link 1,500 new homes and other developments at The Bridge site with Dartford and the new Ebbsfleet station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, with its expected 16min journey time to London St Pancras.

This route will have 10km of dedicated busway and will begin running next spring when the first houses are completed. Every house will be provided with real-time information displays developed by ACIS Research & Development of Cambridge in conjunction with Cityspace of London. They will display the arrival times of the next four buses from the nearest stop and also provide local weather forecasts and national news updates.

These displays will work off the satellite-based tracking and information system already provided at the bus stops between Dartford and Bluewater on route B. This works from a wireless broadband connection covering the area. It requires no hard wiring. It gives expected arrival times of the next four buses as well as extracts from BBC news bulletins. Waiting passengers at these stops can already access national UK bus or train information or see and print-off maps of the locality or their intended destination.

Serious work on Fastrack began with a small team six-and-a-half years ago. An early decision was to opt for buses, not trams, and to provide a premium service at no extra cost. The need was to change the perception of buses held by those living outside London and to stretch the road network rather than restrict it by just adding bus lanes. A short section of road on route B is the only place where this aim could not be achieved. Elsewhere. the new 6.75m wide busways are exclusively for Fastrack. Between Dartford and Bluewater, the route serves the vast new Darent Valley Hospital, in the main foyer of which is a next bus times display for the stops outside.

Onwards from Bluewater, there have only been minor junction improvements so far, but a dramatic plan for a new busway bridge at Greenhithe is a possibility. Fares on route B are pitched at the same level as other bus routes in the area. Launch of the route was accompanied by a marketing campaign, which included radio advertising and visits to schools.

Report by JOHN ALDRIDGE, pictures by MARK LYONS

Left: One of the high-quality information displays at Fastrack stops.

Below: Arriva Kent Thameside 3812 (GN06 EVT), one of the Fastrack Wright-bodied Volvos, in Princes Road, Dartford.

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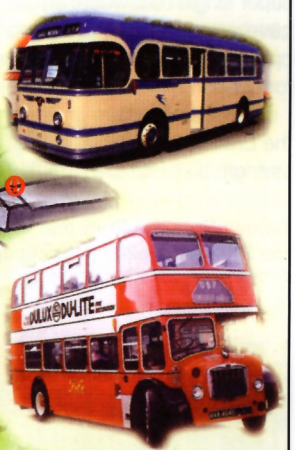

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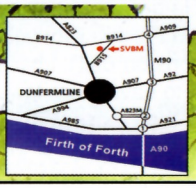

ALEXANDER DENNIS REPLACES DART WITH . . . DART

Alexander Dennis has bowed to a marketing inevitability by naming the successor to its best-selling Pointer Dart midibus the Enviro200 Dart.

Last summer, when it first announced the new model — which goes on sale in June — it talked of an Enviro200SPD or Enviro200LE, to differentiate it from the offside rear-engined Enviro200 that predecessor TransBus launched in 2003. But having sold 12,000 Darts in 16 years, it recognises that the successor must retain the name.

Put simply, the new midibus combines the body structure and styling of the Enviro200 with the simpler Dart chassis. It retains the centre, rear engine layout and T-drive of the Dart, but has a beefed up chassis with front suspension and Wabco disc brakes from the larger Enviro300 single-decker (the manufacturer says discs are easier to change and more reliable than drum brakes) and a heavier duty Dana rear axle.

The cab is identical to that on the Enviro400 double-decker and the Enviro300, while the body structure and styling are derived from the 100% low-floor Enviro200, whose rear exit and super single rear wheel layout have yet to win friends among operators or, crucially, at Transport for London.

The body structure is similar to the Enviro300's, but with extra strength built into the cantrail to satisfy demand for easily replaced gasket glazing. Although similar to the original Enviro200, the front end has been restyled to match the profile of the Enviro400. Alexander Dennis is likely to modify the Enviro300 structure to accommodate gasket glazing and to replace its front and rear — derived from the stillborn Plaxton Bus2000 — with the styling of the 200 and 400 models.

The body structure also provides strength to equip the Enviro200 Dart with cantilever rather than floor-mounted seats. Overall seating capacity and pitch are unchanged from the Pointer Dart, although seats are spaced more evenly towards the back. The main seating change is that, outside London, buses will have an extra row of forward-facing seats and three fewer inward-facing tip-ups. TfL outlaws tip-ups.

The new model will only be available with Cummins Euro4 ISBe4 engines. While the six-cylinder ISBe is restricted to the longest version of the current Dart, it will be an option on all but the shortest Enviro200 Dart. Operator pressure has led Alexander Dennis to offer the six-cylinder engine on most lengths of chassis — rival Optare's Cummins-powered Solos only have six-cylinder engines — but it believes the majority will still prefer the four-cylinder version. Transmission options will be the Allison S2100 four or five-speed or Voith DV500 three-speed. In all, five lengths will be offered. First into production — chassis at Guildford, body at Falkirk — will be the 8.9m replacement for the Mini Pointer Dart 29-seater and a 10.7m model. By the end of the year, 9.5m, 10.3m and 11.4m versions will be available, the longest replacing the Super Pointer Dart.

The Pointer Dart will probably be phased out as the Enviro200 Dart is introduced, but besides being the only option for customers wanting Euro3-engined buses, Alexander Dennis doesn't rule out building some Pointer Darts with Euro4 engines.

The Enviro200 Dart faces tougher competition than the Pointer Dart did at the peak of its sales. Indeed, having achieved an average of 800 Dart sales a year over its lifetime, it sold around 480 last year in a market in which Plaxton, VDL, Optare and MAN are becoming increasingly active. The revised chassis will be made available later to third party bodybuilders like East Lancs and MCV, which account for 7% of bus output from Guildford.

Above: The first Enviro200 Dart being built on the production line at Falkirk.

Below: An impression of what the completed bus will look like.

Below: Note the front end styling differences on the 2003 Enviro200 prototype. GEOFF RIXON

BACK IN THE BLACK

Alexander Dennis is profitable again, 22 months after it rescued the TransBus chassis and bus bodybuilding business from administration. It lost £10.6million pretax between May and September 2004, but made a £4million pretax profit over the next 12 months.

VOLVO ENVIRO400 BEING BUILT

The first Enviro400-bodied Volvo double-decker is currently being built at Falkirk. Production versions on B9TL chassis are likely to have more lower saloon seats than those with other bodywork, but fewer than those with Dennis chassis.

HARLOW FOR LONDON REFURBS

Alexander Dennis is breaking into the growing London bus refurbishment market with a new service and body repair facility at Harlow, Essex and has secured orders to refurbish 170 buses mainly for First and Stagecoach.

The 27,000sqft former cash-&-carry warehouse replaces the existing south-east England service centre in Ware, Hertfordshire. Before TransBus was formed in 2000, the Ware site was owned by Plaxton, and until 1963 was Thurgood's coach factory.

All 16 employees at Ware will relocate to Harlow during April, and a further 12 are to be recruited. The new premises are tall enough to lift double-deckers and have 12 double-deck bays plus others for single-deckers.

WRIGHTBUS TO BODY NEW MAN SINGLE-DECKER FOR UK

Wrightbus has struck an exclusive deal with MAN to body a new full low-floor 12m single-decker in the UK and Ireland. It also plans to update its existing double-deck and midibus ranges.

The Meridian body, based on Wright's 'Millennium' family of Solar and Eclipse bodies on Scania and Volvo chassis, will be fitted on the new German-built, Euro4-engined MAN A22 chassis. It will be the first-ever Wright-bodied MAN and will compete directly against the Mercedes-Benz Citaro and Scania N-series, which have a low floor for the full length of the bus.

Mark Nodder, Wright's vice president for business development, says the Meridian will maximise seating capacity by minimising engine and transmission intrusion. It will incorporate design changes being made to the Solar and Eclipse Urban bodies on the Scania K230UB and Volvo B7RLE, notably a new cab layout.

Standard versions will be single-door, but Wrightbus and MAN hope to sell multiple-door versions to airport bus operators.

The first Meridian is due to be ready by the end of the year and an initial production batch of 20 is planned. A further 20 are earmarked for an order expected from an as yet unnamed UK operator.

In the longer term, as production at its Ballymena plant nudges towards 1,000 bodies a year, it may develop a left-hand-drive version for niche European markets like Denmark, which prefers aluminium bodies to steel but no longer has its own bodybuilders following Volvo and Scania's closure of their Aabenraa and DAB plants.

This agreement marks a further step in Neoman UK managing director Vince Welsh's plan to increase MAN's share of the UK market through partnerships with leading bodybuilders. It is enlarging the range of bus chassis bodied by East Lancs and MCV, and has added Plaxton to its coach body partners; he also hopes to offer the 14.220 midibus with the Plaxton Centro bus body.

MAN tendered unsuccessfully last year to supply a Wright-bodied version of the low-entry 18.220 — as built for Stagecoach with Alexander Dennis ALX300 body — but the Meridian is the first formal partnership between the two companies.

Wrightbus is also working with Volvo and VDL on revised Gemini bodies on their new Euro4-engined double-deckers. To match the lead that Alexander Dennis has set with its new Enviro400, both will have more seats downstairs, but they will achieve this by two different ways from the Enviro400, which uses a trapezoid-shaped fuel tank under the staircase. First into production will be the revised Eclipse Gemini on Volvo B9TL chassis, with the Pulsar Gemini following when VDL builds its Euro4 successor to the current DB250.

And Wrightbus plans to develop a diesel/electric hybrid double-decker — initially for London — building on the technology in its Electrocity midibus, which it is now prepared to put into volume production.

Earlier plans to offer the Gemini on the Scania N-series have been dropped, as rear axle loading would have reduced its seating capacity, prompting FirstGroup to lose interest in the option.

The Cadet midibus body — built on the VDL SB120, also sold through the Volvo network as the Merit and used as the basis of the Electrocity — and the bigger Commander are to be restyled with the windscreen and other styling elements of the 'Millennium' range. They use the 'Classic' body style, which Wrightbus recognises is being left behind by the Plaxton Centro and Alexander Dennis's new Enviro200 Dart.

STREETCAR SALES COULD GO GLOBAL

Wrightbus has begun to explore European and North American export opportunities for its StreetCar bus rapid transit vehicle, the first UK examples of which enter service with First York on 8 May.

Initial UK production — one vehicle a week — is exclusively for First, which is taking 39 articulated StreetCars in addition to the prototype launched last year, all based on a modified Euro3-engined Volvo B7LA chassis.

The first 11 are destined for the York 'ftr' service, to cover a weekday peak requirement of 10; the second 15 are due in service in Leeds in the autumn. Towns and cities outside Yorkshire are bidding to use the others on a third 'ftr' scheme. First intends to buy a further 60 on Euro4-engined B9LA chassis for additional 'ftr' routes, but Wrightbus has already begun discussing export opportunities — including in France and Spain — with Volvo. It is interested in developing another version, probably with American chassis components — for the United States and Canada, and intends to develop a hybrid electric StreetCar for home and export markets.

One of the new StreetCars for York 'ftr' route 4. Ten are painted in this new livery designed by Ray Stenning's Best Impressions agency; the 11th will wear the winning design in a national students' competition.

TRANSLINK SEEKS GOLDLINE COACH CONTRACTORS

Translink, the Northern Ireland state transport company, has invited expressions of interest from operators prepared to operate additional express services on a sub-contractual basis.

Until now, its Ulsterbus subsidiary has provided all regular journeys with its own vehicles and drivers. The new services would be late night cross-border journeys between Belfast and Dublin and additional timings on the trunk Goldline Express routes linking Belfast with Omagh, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Coleraine; these journeys are generally on a two-hourly frequency in addition to existing Goldline timetables.

The new operations would operate as 'express carriage', which in Northern Ireland means on a 30-mile closed-door basis, whereas Goldline generally operates as stage carriage. Initially, contracts would run for three years, and coaches would be no more than 12 years old.

As the government department responsible for licensing services has had only limited success in encouraging Ulster independent operators to start competitive express services, it isn't clear whether they will be any more interested in this proposal. However, First's recent move into Northern Ireland with a three-bus shuttle contract at Belfast International Airport, suggests that this could provide an opening for UK mainland groups.

MULTI-MODAL TICKET FOR NORTH WALES

Exploring North Wales by bus and train is due to be simplified with the April launch of Tocyn Taith, the region's new multi-modal ticket.

The area covered by the ticket is divided into six county zones and one for Chester. A day's travel in two adjacent zones costs £6, three zones £10, four zones £15 and all zones £20. Family and multi-day all zones versions are available from staffed rail stations. One-day tickets should be available from bus drivers, Arriva train conductors and stations.

The ticket was to have been launched before Christmas but was delayed after independent bus operators raised concerns over revenue apportionment, particularly as the ticket is predicted to be better used in the tourism areas, including the Snowdon Sherpa network, than in urban areas. To help build a picture of usage, customers are asked to complete a travel diary of the services used, giving the time and operator of each. Diaries will be entered into a prize draw, although the ticket does not explain the value of the prize or when the draw takes place. Customers are also expected to pay for postage, no freepost address being provided.

The Gwynedd zone — the biggest in the scheme — extends to Llangefni/Amlwch on Anglesey and Machynlleth and Aberystwyth, in Mid Wales, as Tocyn Taith replaces the Gwynedd Red Rover bus ticket, which covers Anglesey, Gwynedd, part of Conwy and routes to Aberystwyth and Llangollen. The Wrexham zone includes Gobowen, Shropshire. All-zones tickets include travel on the Festiniog and Welsh Highland steam railways, and on trains between Machynlleth and Gobowen via Shrewsbury.

NCT REVIVES SOUTH NOTTS LIVERY FOR SPECIAL DAY

Nottingham City Transport celebrated the 80th anniversary of South Notts Buses on 13 March by repainting one of its remaining East Lancs-bodied Volvo Olympians in traditional South Notts navy and maroon.

NCT bought South Notts — owned 50% by Barton Transport for much of its independent existence — in 1991, ironically on the 65th anniversary of its start of services. The Olympian will operate mainly on former South Notts route 1 (Nottingham-Loughborough), and specific journeys on the service at weekends.

Picture by GARETH PERKINS

FIRST CONFIRMS WRIGHT/VOLVO ORDERS

FirstGroup has confirmed a £48million order for 320 Wright-bodied Volvos in the current financial year.

The biggest slice of the order is for 226 Eclipse Urban-bodied B7RLE single-deckers — 113 for First Manchester, 110 for Glasgow and three two-door versions with luggage racks for Aircoach's new First Northern Ireland operation. The Aircoach buses were being built in April; the Manchester and Glasgow orders are smaller than originally planned, down by seven buses for Manchester and by 13 for Glasgow.

Sixty-six Eclipse Gemini-bodied B7TL double-deckers will be shared between Leeds (28), Bradford (20), South Yorkshire (10) and Somerset & Avon (eight), while the other 28 vehicles in the order are the second and third batches of B7LA-based StreetCars.

ROUTEMASTER REQUIEM BOOK WINNERS

The winners of our March competition to win Ian Allan Publishing's new *Routemaster Requiem* book are J. K. Grime of Rochdale, B. J. Field of Christchurch, M. Walsh of Northampton, M. Battern of London E12, Neville Ames of Chichester and J. Probert of Chepstow.

Congratulations, and to all who knew the correct answers were that Routemaster bodies were overhauled at Aldenham, Arriva ran route 159 and there were 524 RMLs.

IN *BUSES* NEXT MONTH

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More new publications for the Spring . . . . .

- **London Bus Magazine** (no. 135) includes a major article entitled *London's Bus Garages – the changing face of London's bus garage infrastructure – part 1, and a photographic tribute to the Cobham gathering in April 2005*, as well as the usual *Around & About* quarterly review and book reviews. Our quarterly glossy magazine is now **full colour** (except where we have historical photographs) and in this issue also illustrates recent route changes, special workings and some more photographs from the last main stream Routemaster routes. £5.00 (£4.00 to members).

- For the **QUICKEST** and **MOST UP-TO-DATE** information on the ever changing London bus scene members of LOTS receive our monthly Newsletter, The London Bus (TLB), which in one illustrated Newsletter covers all the current operators in the former London Transport area.

- **London Bus and Tram Fleetbook 2006** – up-to-date to March 2006. Due in early April - £7.00 (£6.50 to members).
- **London Buses in 2005** - a year that will go down in history for Londons's buses. Due in early April - £7.00 (£6.00 to members).
- Don't forget that this year the **Autumn Transport Spectacular** will again be at Harrow Leisure Centre and the date is Saturday the 4th November.

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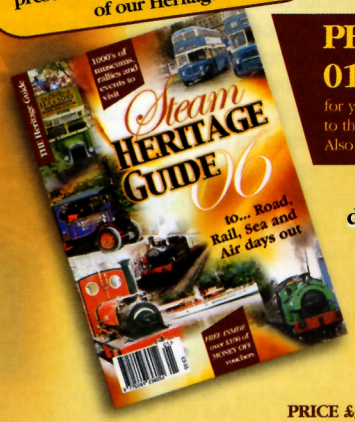

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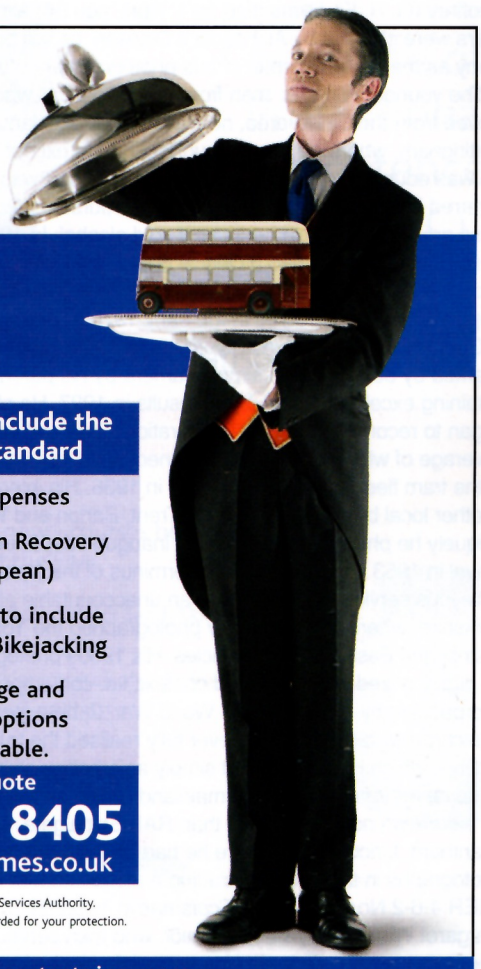

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TOP INDUSTRY CONSULTANT APPOINTED MD AT GO NORTH EAST

In one of the biggest surprises of the year, leading bus industry consultant **Peter Huntley** *(pictured)* is taking over as managing director of Go North East on 24 April, following the departure of previous post holder **Paul Matthews**.

Peter Huntley remains chairman of the TAS Partnership, which he helped found in 1989 after a career in the local authority public transport sector. At TAS, he and his colleagues have provided expert support and market analysis for most major operators as well as to local and national government. They are credited with developing and selling the concept of high-frequency simple networks like First's Overground and Blackpool Transport and Brighton & Hove's Metro services.

Until now, he has also been recognised as one of the industry's top commentators, and he has just written his final monthly column for *Transit* magazine. His criticism of FirstGroup last year — notably its apparent inability to recruit and retain bus managers — led First to terminate its relationship with TAS.

PAUL HILL RETIRES, FIRST'S GARY NOLAN JOINS STAGECOACH

First South Yorkshire managing director **Gary Nolan** has left to succeed **Paul Hill** *(pictured)* as managing director of Stagecoach Lincolnshire.

He has spent 23 of the past 26 years with First and its predecessors. He joined as a conductor in 1978 and rejoined in 1998 as general manager, becoming MD in 2000. He leaves First with the ringing endorsement of UK Bus deputy MD Dave Kaye, who says: 'We wish to extend our thanks for the many years of dedicated service and excellent work he has delivered while with the group and wish him every success in his future career'.

Paul Hill retired on 31 March, coincidentally after 23 years in charge of what, in National Bus Company days, was Lincolnshire Road Car. He remained in charge after Traction Group bought the company in 1988 and saw the company through its first weeks as a Stagecoach subsidiary.

FIRST MDs CHANGE IN SOUTH-WEST, IRELAND AND GLASGOW

Further changes at First have seen **Marc Reddy** take over as managing director for Devon & Cornwall, succeeding **Gerald Taylor**, a former railwayman who First says has 'stepped down from his position' but was still employed by the group after the change was announced. **Phil Pannell**, quality assurance manager for First UK Bus, also moves to Devon & Cornwall to succeed engineering director **Karl Duncan**, who has left the company.

Marc Reddy held two roles before, as deputy MD at First Hampshire & Dorset and also as acting MD at Aircoach and First Northern Ireland, the group's two Irish businesses. Before that, he was with yellow Buses and Badger Vectis, the Badgerline/Southern Vectis joint venture in the immediate post-deregulation period.

G. H. F. ATKINS, GRAND OLD MAN OF BUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Geoffrey (G. H. F.) Atkins died on 1 April, age 94. Although his final years were clouded by Alzheimer's Disease, he will be remembered by many as the grand old man of bus photography.

The younger son of a 'man from the Prudential' who had recently moved from the Bristol area, he was born on 25 January 1912 in Nottingham, where he lived throughout his life except for war service. He was educated at High Pavement School, and was subsequently deterred by his strict Baptist parents from pursuing a career with a high class grocery enterprise because it sold alcohol. In 1928, when jobs were scarce, he obtained a clerical post with Nottingham Corporation, and after demob in 1946 he remained with the City Treasurer's Department until he retired in the early 1970s.

Geoffrey Atkins's active 75-year interest in photography was originally sparked by being given a simple camera by his parents as a reward for obtaining excellent school exam results in 1927. He almost immediately began to record Nottingham Corporation's bus and trolleybus fleet, his coverage of which would become unequalled, but he paid little attention to the tram fleet, which disappeared in 1936. His interest soon extended to other local bus enterprises, e.g. Trent, Barton and West Bridgford, and uniquely he photographed both the inaugural departure in 1928 and final arrival in 1953 at the Nottingham terminus of the Notts & Derby trolleybus service. He always felt an unaccountable affinity with Yorkshire, where he extensively photographed the Yorkshire Woollen District and East Yorkshire vehicles. His 1930s photographs would later be highly prized for their period context, i.e. contemporary street furniture and passers by. On the eve of World War 2, he experimented with Ektachrome colour film. He never fully realised the true value of the archive, which he had created simply as a hobby on only modest pay.

He never ventured outside mainland Britain, serving during the war as an electrician no farther afield than RAF Spittalgate, just outside Grantham, Lincolnshire, where he had already taken many railway photographs in the 1930s, including a classic shot of the legendary LNER 4-6-2 No.4472 *Flying Scotsman* in its prime. In 1943 he married Margaret Wood, five years his junior, who then served in the RAF, but whom he had met while walking to work in Nottingham. She died in 1987, but he is survived by his sister Dora, his only son Philip and three grandchildren.

Geoffrey had his first bus photographs published in very early issues of *Buses Illustrated* in 1949. However, these were difficult times. Recently married and with a small son, he was obliged to sell some negatives, which he would later see published under another name. At this time, he began a long friendship with another bus photographer, Roy Marshall, and he was also on close terms with the Nottingham railway photographers Gordon Hepburn, J. P. Wilson and J. F. Henton.

Above: A February 1954 picture by Geoffrey Atkins of a highbridge Bristol K-type in the Lincolnshire Road Car fleet.
IAN ALLAN LIBRARY

A past master in monochrome, also from 1961 Geoffrey increasingly turned to 35mm colour (Kodachrome) and made a point of recording the rapidly changing face of his native city. With his elder brother Harold (a onetime senior journalist on *The Daily Telegraph* and biographer of Sir Thomas Beecham) Geoffrey shared a keen interest in music, particularly jazz and the organ works of J S Bach, and early hi-fi equipment.

PHILIP ATKINS

First has recruited Citylink (Ireland) and Aerdart managing director **Allen Parker** *(pictured left)* from ComfortDelGro to run its Irish businesses. He was previously with Bus Éireann.

Announcing the changes in the south-west, First UK Bus commercial director **Leon Daniels** commented: 'We face a difficult challenge in Devon and Cornwall but I'm confident that the new management team will be able to move our business forward in the area. We must continue to improve reliability and punctuality to meet the travel needs of our customers in Devon and Cornwall by offering quality services that are both sustainable and profitable.'

First Glasgow MD **Eric Stewart** *(pictured left)* has left the company on health grounds. He had been in post since 2003 and had been with the company from the mid-1980s, joining the then Strathclyde Buses as an IT manager.

NATEX CHIEF EXEC TO RETIRE

National Express Group chief executive **Phil White** *(pictured)* is retiring at the end of the year, after nine years in charge. He is 57.

A Sheffield-born accountant, he joined the bus industry in 1975 with South Yorkshire PTE and moved to West Yorkshire PTE in 1981. He helped set up Yorkshire Rider as an arms' length bus company in 1986 and was part of the management/employee that bought the company two years later. In 1994, the year that Badgerline bought Rider Group, he moved to West Midlands Travel as finance director, becoming chief executive the following year around the same time that NatEx acquired WMT. He joined the NatEx board in 1997.

ARRIVA SELECTS NEW ACQUISITIONS EXPERT . . .

Dom McKenna is returning to Arriva as group development director, reporting to deputy chief executive **David Martin** and charged with identifying and pursuing acquisition, joint venture and partnership opportunities. Until it was sold in January, he was managing director of Arriva's vehicle rental business, and before that was operations director with Royal Mail-owned Parcelforce International.

. . . AND NEW MD FOR ORIGINAL TOUR

Arriva business support director **Bob Scowen** *(pictured)* has returned to front-line management as managing director of The Original Tour, its London sightseeing business. He succeeds **Keith Spicer**, now MD at Arriva Southern Counties, a post Bob Scowen held for five years.

RUSSELL RICHARDSON GETS BACK IN THE OPTARE CHAIR

Optare founder **Russell Richardson** has returned to the Leeds-based bus manufacturer as chairman, with a brief to focus on future strategy and business performance. He stepped down last year when managing director **Bob Coombes** and finance director **Roger Fossey** led a management buy-out from then owner NABI, the Hungarian-American business of which Russell Richardson remained chairman. NABI sold its remaining bus manufacturing interests in February.

Welcoming him back, Bob Coombes commented: 'Russell Richardson has always been indelibly linked to Optare and it is great to have him back on board allowing us to draw on his extensive experience in the international bus industry as we move into the future.'

LONG-SERVING MIDLAND RED MOTORWAY DRIVER RETIRES

Stagecoach Warwickshire's longest serving driver, **Malcolm Day** (65), has retired after over 44 years' service. He joined Midland Red in 1962 at Nuneaton garage and became one of the elite group of drivers in charge of the fast motorway coaches to London.

While working on a motorway service, he met his wife **Margaret** through a blind date set up by one of the other drivers. They have been married for 40 years, have one daughter and have fostered 56 children.

As a special treat and surprise, Malcolm drove guests to his retirement party at the wheel of a 40-year-old BMMO D9 double-decker provided by specialist operator Midland Red Coaches.

Report and picture by Steven Knight

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STAGECOACH TAKES MEGABUS.COM TO THE US

Stagecoach has taken its Megabus.com web-booked intercity coach brand to the United States, where its Coach USA subsidiary began operating 10 routes on 10 April with fares starting at $1 (58p) plus a 50c booking fee.

Eight of the first routes link Chicago with Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and St Louis. The other two will connect Indianapolis with Cincinnati and Columbus. All will compete against budget airlines as well as existing coach and rail services and will be operated using 55-seat single-deck coaches painted in the same livery as its Megabus fleet in the UK. Booking will be on the same www.megabus.com website as in the UK.

Stagecoach says the move into the US, which follows its launch of Megatrain.com on its South West Trains franchise last year, will build on the success of Megabus in the UK, which is carrying two million passengers a year on routes serving 40 towns and cities.

Bryony Chamberlain, MD at Stagecoach Warwickshire and the group's youngest UK MD, is moving to the US to manage the new venture.

Stagecoach chief executive Brian Souter says: 'Megabus.com has transformed inter-city travel for millions of people in the UK where our commitment to innovation has successfully established a market-leading brand. We believe there is significant potential to develop the brand and attract large numbers of passengers to the service in North America as part of our continuing organic growth strategy for the group.'

Above: A Coach USA Prevost coach in the familiar Megabus.com livery for services from Chicago.

MALTA BUS DRIVERS BACK DOWN AFTER STRIKE

A three-day bus strike in Malta at the end of February seems to have broken the resolve of drivers and bus owners, after a climb down that saw them accept a reduced subsidy settlement from the government.

The Public Transport Association, representing bus owners and drivers called a general strike after the government failed to pay the remainder of subsidies for 2005, and all buses were off for three days until agreement was reached on further talks.

The PTA claimed that the government had withheld Lm200,000 of the Lm1.3million subsidy due for 2005, but the government refused to pay more than Lm1.25million for the year. An emergency service operated on 14 routes using government-owned schoolbuses, minibuses and army lorries with bench seating. By calling off the strike, the PTA gave up its demand for an additional Lm50,000 and accepted a proposal to reform routes into groups, with a rotating system of drivers. Actual revenue figures showed higher than projected income from fares last year, thus undermining the drivers' claim for extra subsidy.

Other outstanding issues included fines of Lm6,000 imposed by the transport authority after it emerged that some government-funded new buses were not used as much they were supposed to have been.

Route grouping was recommended in the government-commissioned Halcrow report. The idea is to break the transport network into nine more manageable and more easily monitored route clusters with the aim of introducing greater accountability where each driver is responsible for the route. This system would be similar to what Malta had in the 1960s, when buses were painted in different colours and dedicated to specific routes.

More contentiously, Halcrow says the peak vehicle requirement could fall from around 508 buses to 220, with an average requirement of 180. Currently, the buses virtually follow their owners and are officially used on alternate days. The report suggests that buses are used to only 50% of their potential, and estimates that the new buses achieve only 25% of their potential availability.

Left: While the new low-floor buses may be under-used, many more traditional buses still operate in Malta. FBY 666 is a 1970 Leyland Comet with 40-seat Barbara body.

VOLVO ACQUIRES STAKE IN NISSAN DIESEL

Volvo has acquired a 13% shareholding in Nissan Diesel, the Japanese bus and truck manufacturer, in a £111.2million deal that also gives it an option to purchase Nissan Motor's remaining 6% shareholding in the company.

The deal gives Volvo access to Nissan Diesel's dealer and service network in Japan and south-east Asia and opens the door to the joint development of engines and transmissions in future. It may also increase Volvo's already considerable presence in the Chinese market, as Nissan Motor has a 50% stake in Chinese manufacturer Dongfeng Motor.

The tie-up with Nissan Diesel appears to be a direct consequence of Volvo's purchase of Renault Trucks in 2000. Renault Car controls Nissan Motor, while Renault and Nissan Motor at one stage each had a 22.5% stake in Nissan Diesel.

■ Volvo no longer has any shareholding in American schoolbus manufacturer Blue Bird.

NEOPLAN TAKES BACK FIRE-PRONE LAUSANNE TROLLEYBUSES

After two of its futuristic but ill-fated 28 Neoplan dual-mode articulated trolleybuses went up in flames last year, the Swiss city of Lausanne has reached a deal with the German manufacturer to swap the survivors for 22 diesel artics. The Neoplan N6121s artics with Kiepe hub motors and 8cyl Mercedes-Benz diesel engines were dogged with breakdowns from their introduction in 2001, culminating in two fires last year. In April 2005, bus 818 burst into flames at Lutry terminus and burned out completely. A month later, bus 825 caught fire in the depot, prompting a hasty evacuation of dozens of vehicles and the decision to take all the dual-mode trolleys out of service, pending a probe into the cause of the blazes.

Neoplan, which is owned by MAN, says it modified the surviving 26 trolleys to make them reliable, but agreed to take them back in exchange for 22 N4522 artics with Euro 4 engines. These will arrive in February 2007.

Lausanne Transport (TL) director Michel Joye says the aim of the settlement is to avoid a protracted legal battle and he defended the decision to take the diesels. Although they are worth considerably less than the trolleybuses, which cost £11million, the trolleys had covered 5million km between them before they were mothballed.

To ensure that in future 70% of Lausanne's routes are still trolley-operated, the undertaking plans to buy 13 new artic trolleys and 10 new trailers.

Left: A Neoplan N6121 duo-mode trolleybus built to Lausanne specification and painted in TL livery at the UITP exhibition in London in May 2001.

Left: An Ayats-bodied Volvo B7L similar to those operated by Arriva and City Sightseeing in the UK, in service in the French city of Lyon. STEPHEN MORRIS

VANDALS HALT SWEDISH EVENING BUSES

Vandals have forced free evening buses off the roads of the Swedish city of Örebro after only two months. The mostly teenage offenders etched windows, ripped seats and urinated in the vehicles, says Tex Kihlström, area manager for Sweden's second-largest operator Busslink that provides services to many local authorities in the country.

'It was a disaster,' he says. 'We suffered more damage in one weekend than we have done in a whole year.'

The free fare scheme, implemented at a cost of around £220,000, prompted a marked increase in ridership after 18.30 in the city of 127,000 people, which lies west of the capital Stockholm.

MEGA-TROLLEY SWAYS ZURICH

Die Verkehrsbetriebe Zürich (VBZ), which operates buses, trolleybuses and trams in Switzerland's largest city, has gone ahead and bought 17 Hess bi-articulated trolleybuses after six weeks of tests with a similar mega-trolley borrowed from Geneva (Global News, March). VBZ says the electric bus went down well with passengers and drivers and covered 10,000 kilometres on the busy cross-city 31 route. Delivery is scheduled for 2007.

ARNHEM TROLLEY EXTENSION PROVOKES CONTROVERSY

A decision by city authorities in Arnhem to boost the last surviving trolleybus system in the Netherlands has sparked a row over the future of the network.

Shortly after the council approved an extension to serve a new housing development, local politician Theo Theijsse of the VVD party proposed that the entire system be scrapped. In a newspaper article, he said the trolleybuses should be replaced with fuel-cell buses by 2015 at the latest, and urged the setting up of a public fund to pay for the de-wiring of the system, which first opened in 1949.

The suggestion provoked angry readers' letters and a rebuke from the undertaking, which says that, bearing in mind the infrastructure already in place, trolleybuses make much more efficient use of electric power than fuel-cell driven vehicles.

The new section of route 5 will serve the Schuytgraaf estate on the outskirts of the city and is set to cost £870,000.

Dutch state-owned undertaking Connexxion operates Arnhem's distinctive dark blue trolleybuses on behalf of the local authority, but tenders have been invited to operate the system from next January. Bidders are obliged to take over the fleet of 31 mostly Van Hool articulated trolleys and replace the existing 11 rigid trolleys with new vehicles.

DE LIJN TO TRY FUEL-CELL BUS

Van Hool is developing an A300 fuel cell bus for De Lijn, the state-owned operator serving Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium. It will operate in Belgium for six months before being leased to other European transport undertakings in Europe.

RECORD OPTIMA ORDERS

United States midibus manufacturer Optima has won the biggest orders so far for its Opus midibus with Wrightbus body kits. Florida-based Miami-Dade County is taking 300 with options on a further 300 over five years, for operation alongside its British-built NABI 30-LFN (Optare Solo) midis. Chicago Transit Authority has ordered 45 with options on a further 75.

I went there once . . . I keep a picture of it in my pocket

Our transport policy owes too much to American practice and not enough to European thinking

My headline this month is how the legendary American comic film star W. C. Fields described Europe. To his countrymen — even today — Europe is small beer. To the British, too, it is less important than our historic islands. Remember the immortal newspaper headline: 'Fog in Channel — Continent cut off'?

Fewer than 10% of the population of the USA has a passport, so fewer still will have visited one or more European country. Of those who have, most will have come to Britain. So it is for us. The Brits flock to Florida in greater numbers than to nearer Europe (except perhaps for the parts of Spain where fish and chips washed down with pints of lager are more common than paella and rioja). It has always been easier for us Brits — few of whom speak anything other than English — to communicate with people 3,000 miles away, who allegedly share a common language, than with our nearest European neighbours. The French are a mere 22 miles away, but they speak . . . well, French.

As a result of the 'special relationship' and the language, our transport policy since World War 2 has been very American. We are the second greatest users of motor cars on the planet after our US cousins and probably the greatest over distances of less than 1km. Mrs Thatcher not only regarded a 30-something male travelling by bus as a failure but also believed the British were under-privileged as they owned fewer cars per head of population than the Germans. The failure in this case was Maggie's. She did not understand that the Germans use their cars much less — especially in urban areas.

The car for intelligent German tram riders dressed by Gucci

Some years ago the then-newest version of the 7-series BMW was advertised on its home country's television stations with the catch-line 'The man who is intelligent enough to buy this motor car is intelligent enough to know when not to use it'. This came up on the screen after the shiny new vehicle's owner — dressed in a Gucci suit and carrying a stitched leather briefcase — stepped out of the house, went to open the car door, paused for a few seconds, threw the keys in the air, caught and then pocketed them before crossing the street and boarding a tram. The then marketing director of BMW admitted that it just could not advertise the car that way in the UK. He was very honest — telling me we were not sufficiently 'green' and that our public transport was simply not good enough.

So we have an American lifestyle with a transport system that — barring a few bright spots — is not as good as that found in the rest of Europe, and is ultimately in danger of getting into the parlous state of its US equivalent. Though significant and radical improvements have been made on the Continent, the past 10 years in the UK have witnessed little progress.

The responsibility for this rests with government — both national and local. As I have said before, there is no over-arching framework set out by Westminster within which we might — for example — see public transport promoted as the solution to traffic congestion. Indeed, all the signs are that Mr Darling and his colleagues favour more road building in preference to investment in light rail or better buses. And they are clearly reserving capital investment cash for those local authorities brave enough to bite the bullet of urban road pricing or congestion charging.

But if there were to be a change of heart, how could we transform the present laissez-faire approach to something more akin to Continental practice? I am certain that the answer is not a return to pre-1986 regulation and if those who are old enough simply cast their minds back to those heady days they will acknowledge that there were a few good, some bad, but mostly mediocre bus operators — in the state, municipal, PTE and private sectors. As is the case today, there was the small number of Blazefield, Brighton & Hove and Trent Barton equivalents, but if we're honest, most of the industry was just managing decline.

The local highway authorities provided little meaningful support and in the main they give still less now as buses are run by private companies who are treated just the same as other road users. Often there are two, three or even more bus companies to deal with and they may have different views. Rarely is there a regular dialogue to ensure that things are done properly (as witness my tirade against poor bus stop design last month) and the general decline in bus use goes inexorably on. As previously indicated, I believe we need government to take the lead by setting clear policies for environmentally friendly means of sustaining the population's mobility. It also is essential to get the Office of Fair Trading out of the picture and understand that the only competition that matters is the motor car, and that it is in a position to compete unfairly. But for the bus (and the tram and train where appropriate) to be a valid alternative it must be as simple as the car, which is instantly available at the turn of a key.

Common fares, please

So where three different operators serve an area — as in the picture below of Arriva, First and Stagecoach on Merseyside — it is essential for there to be common fares and co-ordinated timetables. That is what has generated the significant growth in urban public transport use in countries like Austria, Germany and Switzerland. This could be achieved by the creation of 'joint stock' companies, which involve all the operators in a given area (and others interested in running buses there) agreeing to share the market, under the supervision of a regulator who would ensure fair play.

The regulator would also have powers to determine routes, frequencies and fares in consultation with the local authorities in the area covered. The local authorities would, in turn, be responsible for meeting challenging targets for the expansion of bus use through better priority at junctions and on the road network generally. If operators fail to perform satisfactorily — based on consistent performance monitoring standards — the regulator would allocate their work to others.

Above all, the link — long since severed — between land use and public transport planning needs to be forged anew and there are signs that the government is thinking this way with talk of the creation of powerful 'city regions' that would be responsible for bus and rail policy. This is clearly a space to be watched.

Right: Liverpool has become another place where the three largest bus groups' buses operate side-by-side and, to varying degrees, in competition with each other. This city centre scene shows a Volvo B10B/Wright Endurance of Arriva Merseyside, a Volvo B10M-55/Northern Counties Paladin of Stagecoach Merseyside and a Scania L113CRL/Wright Axcess-ultralow of First Potteries. PHIL HALEWOOD

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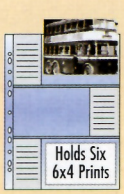

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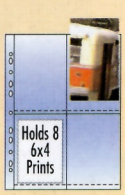

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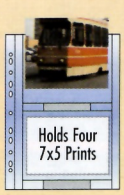

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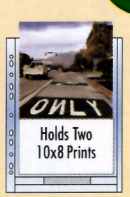

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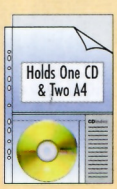

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'JURY STILL OUT ON ARTICS' SAYS MAYOR

After all the enthusiastic publicity (some would say 'hype') for articulated buses, a new report from Mayor Ken Livingstone shows a welcome degree of objectivity.

The value for money statement said 'they (artics) are still effectively on trial. We've only been using them for the past three years. They have worked very successfully on some routes where literally hundreds of people spew out of Victoria or Waterloo stations and get taken not too far. We're seeing how they work on longer routes across London. The jury is out. We'll have to give it time. They may be withdrawn. They may work. Let's not jump to a conclusion.'

Many enthusiasts are anti-artics on principle, ignoring their ability to move large numbers of people quickly and relatively efficiently. But while the mayor's statement refers specifically to the Red Arrow routes at Victoria and Waterloo, even here I wonder about the economics of using such expensive vehicles only five days a week and with an average mileage far lower than other London buses.

Any value for money study needs to look deeply at many factors, starting with the high fuel consumption of around 4mpg. Dare I say it, but a re-engined Routemaster with at least 64 seats against 42 on an artic, does about 8mpg. However, it's the side issues that merit further study. What is the cost of establishing a depot just for the artics on route 207 (Shepherd's Bush-Hayes by-pass) that First CentreWest has at Hayes? If it costs about £1million a year to run any new depot, can this be justified? Then there's the higher wages paid to drivers.

What is the cost, in terms of lessened convenience, to other bus users who find stops moved to make space for artics? For example, heading into central London from the north, there used to be a stop in New Oxford Street, by Tottenham Court Road tube station, just before buses on the 24 and 29 turned left into Charing Cross Road. It was used heavily by many who wanted to go to/from Oxford Street, but has been abolished for both the rigid buses on the 24 and the artics on the 29. Both now go a long way down Charing Cross Road before stopping. What is the cost to other road users and to other buses caused by artics blocking road junctions, as they do at times?

Meanwhile, Transport for London's own customer newsletter *The Londoner* is busy publicising the results of a survey of passengers before and after the changeover of the 29 (now Wood Green-Trafalgar Square). All 614 passengers (including 83 with pushchairs) questioned while travelling between Manor House and Warren Street said they had previously used the low-floor double-deckers on the route; 56% said the artics are better because they have more space for pushchairs, shopping and luggage and are easier to board and alight, while 19% said they are worse.

A hidden cost here is that the 29 previously ran farther north, to Palmers Green, with the cutback being covered by extending the 141 from Wood Green to Palmers Green. But did that change involve any inconvenience to through passengers on the old 29?

I still think TfL should try three-axle double-deckers on a busy route, as an alternative to introducing a higher frequency. I know that the extra axle means more relatively high seats over two axles instead of one, but there would be less obstruction at stops and road junctions, little or no need to move bus stops, and existing garages could accommodate them. If they work well in Hong Kong, why not here?

OLDEST DRIVERS PUSHED OUT AS MORE ROUTES CHANGE HANDS

After years of driver shortages, 27 drivers employed by Arriva London South at its Croydon, Beddington Farm and Norwood garages have been made redundant.

All were over 65 and one only recently received a special Transport for London award. This move – at a time when the government tells us we will all have to work for longer – follows loss of routes 68, X68 N68 and 468 to London Central from the beginning of April. That removed a peak requirement of over 40 buses and between two and three times as many drivers. There are rumours that Arriva may take some of them back in September when it takes over route 60 (Old Coulsdon-Streatham) from Travel London.

More immediate tendering news affects routes over the boundary from London. Metrobus has at last vacated its leased South Godstone base, inherited when it took over East Surrey Buses in 1997, and has completed the move to Beddington Lane. It has hardly been an ideal location for working many TfL routes, though better sited for county council tendered rural routes.

Metrobus has lost six Surrey County Council school routes, plus three others, perhaps partly because operating the routes in question from Beddington Lane or Crawley would involve much dead mileage. The most notable loss is of the 409 (Croydon-Godstone-East Grinstead), which has a section run under London Local Service Agreement conditions. It has been won by Southdown PSV – of which Metrobus co-founder Peter Larking is a director – bringing that company's buses into the TfL area. Southdown PSV picks up most of the Surrey schools services. Metrobus has also lost its small network in Edenbridge, Sevenoaks and Westerham to Arriva Southern Counties in a Kent County Council retendering exercise.

Big changes in Hertfordshire from late March also saw Metroline lose its Sunday operations on the 242 to Trustline, which gains an evenings and Sundays operation on the 311 from Arriva the Shires & Essex.

In London, the latest tender awards — for contracts starting in September — see four minor route losses and gains, with just two single-deckers being the only new buses. These are for Blue Triangle, which gains the 648 (Gallows Corner-Cranham) from First Capital. The 370D goes to First Capital from Arriva Kent Thameside (one existing double-decker), while the 652 (Rainham-Upminster) goes from Blue Triangle to First Capital (two double-deckers) and the 679 (Woodford-Goodmayes) from Arriva London North to First Capital (two double-deckers).

More substantial services, but with no losses or gains, are the 103 (Rainham-North Romford) still with First Capital (but with 11 single-deckers instead of 10), the 256 (Noak Hill-Hornchurch) still with Arriva Kent Thameside (10 single-deckers) and the 346 (Upminster-Upminster Park) also still with AKT (two single-deckers). First Capital retains three other school routes, the 646 (Noak Hill-Cranham) with three single-deckers, the 656 (Romford-Emerson Park) with two double-deckers and the 686 (Romford-Harold Hill) with two double-deckers. The Arriva Kent Thameside workings are actually operated by Arriva Southend from Grays.

Below Go-Ahead has transferred some London General Volvo B7TLs to Metrobus to operate route 127 (Tooting Broadway-Purley), taken over from Centra on 25 February at short notice. Plaxton President-bodied 867 (X597 EGK) was previously PVL197. GERRY MEAD

THE COST OF THE HERITAGE ROUTEMASTERS

Recent revelations about tender prices show that each of the heritage Routemaster routes is costing around £1million a year.

First London is being paid £919,673 to operate the 9 (Aldwych-Royal Albert Hall), while Stagecoach East London will receive £895,000 for the 15 (Tower Hill-Trafalgar Square). Transport for London leases the buses to the operators at a nominal £1 a year each, so wages, fuel and insurance are the main elements of the costs. Cheaper quotes of £834,151 for the 9 and £823,756 for the 15 both fell short of TfL's quality requirements.

Several friends have confirmed my experiences of the routes with smartly turned-out buses and (with just one exception) helpful and informative conductors. Some of the conductors fall short of the high standards once attained by the best of the old traditional ones. Perhaps there should be lessons in public speaking for them so that the more reticent do not feel self-conscious in announcing the names of more important stops and generally project a positive image.

Also, I'd like to see more publicity at each bus stop than just a simple timetable display. Maybe a colour drawing — or even a cartoon — of a Routemaster, and a separate colour flag below the route number display. Something, perhaps, for Ray Stenning of Best Impressions?

The 9 would benefit by being extended to Kensington High Street. The Albert Hall isn't a prime tourist destination, and the stopping and turning arrangements there are less than ideal; return journeys begin at one request stop east of the Albert Hall. Kensington High Street would be far more popular and useable for potential passengers.

Tourists would really prefer if the two routes were combined so that those shopping in Kensington could catch a bus straight to the Tower or vice versa. Piccadilly Circus would also be a better inward destination for 15s than Trafalgar Square. But such a move might provoke the strong disabled lobby, since there is no equivalent low-floor bus service between the Tower and Kensington.

Above: Several buses — including Arriva London South DAF DB250/Wright Pulsar Gemini DW4 (LJ03 MWU) — carry an OysterCard advertising livery to sell more of the smartcards in suburban south London. RICHARD GODFREY

Right: Metrobus's current preference for Scanias has prompted delivery of 23 new East Lancs-bodied N94UB OmniTown midibuses with fronts and rears of the bodybuilder's new Esteem design. They are for routes 181 and 284, on which 610 (YM55 SXD) was photographed at Ravensbourne Park, Catford. RICHARD GODFREY

Docklands Buses AE06 HCC, a new MCV-bodied Dennis Dart, on route 368 (Barking-Chadwell Heath), which has been taken over from Blue Triangle. STEVE MASKELL

Whatever happened to...? ...easyBus minibuses

Yes, this is the same question that I raised a year ago, but more has happened to the great what-might-have-been that was Stelios Haji-Ioannou's orange minibus service.

Before the man who created the wonderful easyJet started his web-booked minibuses two years ago, his people did all they could to create an impression that this was something National Express should fear in the same way that his airline seriously rattled the established lines. Only, before he started, NatEx faced a more potent potential competitor in Stagecoach's Megabus.com.

Somehow, the big blue bus business model looked the better bet. Lots of people paying low fares to travel together in one vehicle appeared to add up more successfully than little groups paying low fares to ride in more frequent minibuses. It was more like the way Stelios's airline worked, but the industry stood ready to be proved wrong. And Julian Peddle, the astute businessman whose MK Metro business ran the first easyBus routes under contract, could see an opportunity.

The problem for easyBus is that it hasn't got past first base. It started out with what either was an inspired move or the crazy idea of linking perhaps the least appealing destinations in south-east England. Not London-Birmingham as had once been mooted, but Hendon Central and Milton Keynes, followed by Hendon and Luton Airport. Pre-booking a journey out of Luton seemed a big gamble when flights are frequently delayed, so there was the option of a cash fare. But while one could see the operational benefit of not running the minibuses in the heaviest central London traffic, the easyBus market was limited by expecting its passengers to schlep in and out of town via a suburban Underground station.

It soon extended the routes into Marylebone and over the past year has rationalised the service to give up the Milton Keynes service to concentrate on the airport. Arriva took over the operating contract before it bought MK Metro this year.

SURELY SOMETHING IS MISSING HERE

Warrington is about to have a new bus station. Well, in these aspirational times, it's not called a bus station, but a bus interchange, which is fair enough. The Warrington folks are justifiably proud of the new facility, which — as Gwyn Griffiths points out — will 'replace the previous horrible underground monstrosity'. My recollection isn't of it being underground, but I wouldn't quibble with the monstrosity bit and maybe it just felt underground when he was there.

While the interchange may have the word 'bus' appended to it, buses are strangely absent from the publicity material. Lots of glass, some tasteful sculptures, a pair of black cabs, some ornamental trees and what Gwyn describes as 'those strange elongated humans so popular in architects' impressions'. But not a bus in sight.

I fear this says something about architects' attitude towards buses. You might recall a similarly bus-free picture we published in March of the planned new Swansea bus station. We tried to bring you one with a hint of bus in it but the architects apparently didn't have one. Would they offer pictures of an airport without aeroplanes? I rather think not.

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COULD YOU POSSIBLY RESIST THIS?

For those of you who have written from all ends of the earth appealing for a Routemaster-free issue, I'm sorry but this isn't it. Apart from the others illustrated elsewhere this month, I found this one irresistible in a strange, almost suicidal way.

My thanks to Chris Minter and E. Patrickson, who extracted the advertisement from what appears to be a catalogue of questionable gifts — like a combined dog lead, torch, radio and siren alert (all yours for £7.99 and, honestly, I couldn't make that one up). This atrocity is a true symbol of London, forsooth, and 'your chance to get a symbol of British transporting history'. Apparently it's a Routemaster with a 'quartz action timepiece' attached.

The full front, platform doors and botched welding swiftly undermine any resemblance to a real RM. I don't know about you, but if I wanted an RM model (okay, as Mrs M reminds me, *yet another* RM model), it wouldn't look this awful or have a clock glued on its side. And if I wanted another clock, that's all it would be. Just a clock. I'd willingly pay more than £7.99 for it.

AND THIS ONE IS IN STITCHES

Knowing of his interests, a friend gave my colleague Stephen Morris this RM toilet bag a little while back. Purists might quite literally get themselves in a lather over a few missing points of detail, but for my money it's a perfectly acceptable representation of the real thing. I would even countenance using it to conceal a 'Route Master Clock' were anyone misguided enough to buy me one. Just a shame that the stitcher doesn't know the difference between the front and the back.

BUS SHELTER OF THE MONTH

CORGI

Congratulations to our old friend Thomas Knowles, who wins this month's Corgi 1/76th-scale diecast model for sending me an out-of-the-ordinary bus picture for these pages.

The bus shelter is in Beech, near Newcastle-under-Lyme and although it may look like it was made of beech or was washed up on a beach, it actually was cast in concrete. Thomas tells me that shelters like this were commonplace across the Potteries when he was growing up in the 1950s — complete collections of them in bus stations and at busy intersections, with the added embellishment of an ultimate destination in green.

It says something for the design that this one has lasted so long, and it would be nice to think it might be saved by a Midlands transport museum for future generations to appreciate. But as Thomas points out, today's bus passengers surely deserve something better to sit in while waiting for the apparently infrequent D&G route through Beech.

Keep your eyes open and camera ready for your own offbeat colour picture opportunities and send the results to me at the **new address**. You, too, could win a Corgi diecast.

For further information on Corgi, visit the website at www.corgiclassics.com or for details of your local stockist, call Corgi customer services on 0845 603 9070.

ONE FOR THE PHILATELISTS' ALBIUM

Guy Halford-Macleod keeps an alert eye open for stamps bearing images of buses upon them. According to the wording on this old automobile issue from Ghana, it depicts an 'Albium double-decker bus'. If it's meant to be an Albion, I doubt if anyone in Scotstoun would recognise it as one of theirs. The painted radiator surround looks far more like a Daimler's, and it is uncannily like a solitary CVD6 double-decker supplied to the Gold Coast — as Ghana was then known — in the late-1940s.

THIS ONE MUST BE AN LTS

There's still time to take yourself along to the Essex seaside and enjoy the Leigh Operatic & Dramatic Society's presentation of Cliff Richard's *Summer Holiday*. Nothing so humdrum as Cliff's London RT — they're 10 a penny, after all — but what the poster suggests will be a perfectly reconstructed prewar STL — converted to left-hand-drive.

My thanks to john Lidstone for spotting it.

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Top: This year's Cobham Bus Museum open day and vehicle gathering on 2 April — ironically a day before hosepipe vans came into force across southern England — was visited by several exceptionally heavy rain showers of the sort seasoned rally visitors associate more readily with the Showbus rally in September. Here, visitors shelter under their umbrellas at Wisley Airfield while waiting to board Metroline AEC Routemaster coach RMC1513 (513 CLT) and Stagecoach Leyland Titan T1 on the shuttle service to the museum.

Middle: Events like the Wisley gathering help remind us that bus preservation isn't just about pristine vehicles. Former Capital Citybus 739 (KRS 539V) — still in as withdrawn condition — is a Leyland National 2 that began life as Alexander (Northern) NPN5 (GSO 5V).

Bottom: An example of the pristine preserved vehicles at Wisley was East Kent CFN 104, a 1948 Park Royal-bodied Leyland Tiger PS1/1 coach.

Top: Among the modern buses helping provide the free connecting services between Wisley, Cobham and Weybridge station was Stagecoach London 18500, the *Spirit of London*, the prototype Alexander Dennis Enviro400 seen leaving Wisley towards the end of the day.

Inset top: A tongue-in-cheek 'destination' on one of the many Routemasters at the Wisley gathering.

Middle: Westway Coach Services of Raynes Park, south-west London, brought along this brand new tri-axle Volvo B12B with 79-seat Van Hool Astrobel body — possibly the first double-deck Van Hool T9 coach for a UK operator.

Bottom: Solent Blue Line 401 (HX06 EZA), the first of its 10 new Mercedes-Benz Citaros, alongside sister Go-Ahead subsidiary Wilts & Dorset 408 (HF05 GGO), a convertible open top East Lancs Myllennium Vyking-bodied Volvo B7TL.

Manchester Metroshuttle

Manchester City Centre now has a network of three free routes linking key destinations. MARTIN ARTHUR looks at the services, their rationale and their antecedents

Above: Optare Solos on routes 1 and 3 queue for passengers on the approach ramp to Piccadilly station. LUKE GOTTARD

Getting people to and from city centres has long been seen as a major objective of transport planning, but there is also a need to move them around those centres once they arrive. In towns and smaller cities, everything is within walking distance of car parks and bus and rail stations, but larger centres require public transport connections.

Manchester City Centre is has such a complex city centre. Its shopping core is shaped like a capital letter H, with Market Street at the centre, Deansgate/St Ann's Square and Exchange Square at one side and Oldham Street/Piccadilly at the other. The retail focus has shifted towards the Exchange Square end over the past 20 years, but efforts are now being made to regenerate the Oldham Street area as the Northern Quarter.

Peripheral rail and bus stations, car parks, hotels, cultural facilities and further education institutions all need to be inter-connected. And the adjoining part of Salford, which has never had a city centre but looked to Manchester just over its boundary, has functionally become part of that centre. So much so that the two areas are now referred to in planning, economic and transport parlance as the 'regional centre'.

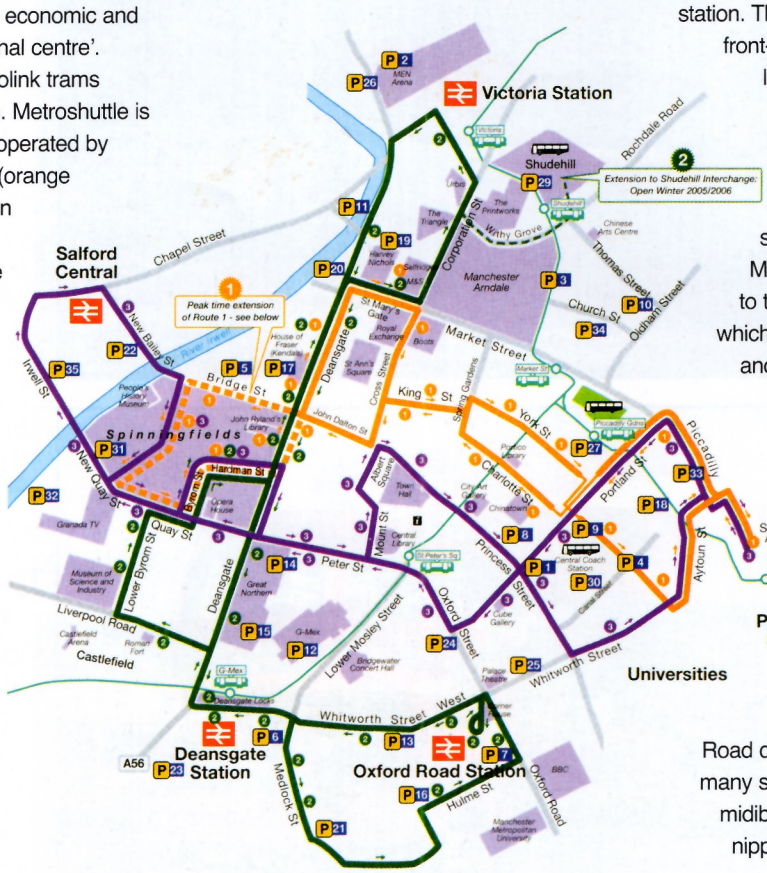
Metroshuttle buses and Metrolink trams connect these diverse locations. Metroshuttle is a three-route free bus network operated by Optare Solos. Two routes — 1 (orange branded) and 2 (green) began in September 2002 and were joined three years later by route 3 (purple).

A long parentage

Victorian railway companies provided Manchester with terminal stations around the periphery of the city centre at London Road (later Piccadilly), Victoria, Exchange, Central and Oxford Road, as well as a through station at Deansgate. There was no truly central station. Manchester Corporation operated an inter-station tram service from 1905, replacing it with buses in 1932.

Taxi owners campaigned vigorously against it and the service as such ceased in 1946, by which time cross-city buses provided these connections, as well as linking the bus stations in Stevenson Square, Lower Mosley Street, Victoria and Cannon Street — also on the edge of the city centre.

The idea was revived between 1961 and 1965 as City Circle services A and B.



Service A ran from Piccadilly bus station via Portland Street, Central Station, Lower Mosley Street, Knott Mill and Deansgate Station, the Deansgate shopping area, the former Exchange bus terminal, and the then principal shopping thoroughfare, Market Street. Service B operated in the reverse direction but cut back earlier to the east side of the centre, serving Chorlton Street bus station and Piccadilly rail station. They were operated initially using four front-entrance Leyland Royal Tigers, latterly by two-door Panther Cubs.

The Centreline era

During the late 1960s, Manchester turned its attention first to a north-south rail link connecting Langley and Middleton with Manchester Airport, later to the Piccadilly-Victoria (Picc-Vic) tunnel, which would have connected the northern and southern rail systems and included underground stations at the Royal Exchange and Albert Square.

Pending government approval for the rail link, Greater Manchester Transport launched its Centreline service between the two stations in 1974, different routes from those of its predecessors. Princess Road, Queens Road and Frederick Road depots all provided 19-seat (plus as many standees) Seddon Pennine 4.236 midibuses from a batch of 43. They were nippy vehicles, which could use streets

Right: Centreline on the Piccadilly approach ramp pre-deregulation in the mid-1980s, with 1717 (XVU 347M) leading a line of four of Greater Manchester Transport's Seddon Pennine 4.236 Midibuses on the link across to Victoria. ALAN MILLAR

unsuitable for full-size buses, but unloading was slow for the well-filled peak workings.

The original Centreline route 4 operated between 07.00 and 19.00 on weekdays only. The fare climbed rapidly during the inflationary 1970s, from 2p at the start to 6p by 1977, and 15p by 1986. The short-lived Saturday shoppers' service 5 ran from Piccadilly Station only as far as St Mary's Gate/Market Street.

The Callaghan government turned down the Picc-Vic proposal in 1976. The Seddons soldiered on until 20 Northern Counties-bodied Dennis Dominos took their place from late-1985. They were unpopular with drivers and passengers. Their ride was poor, fuel consumption heavy, and their rare Maxwell gearboxes were troublesome.

The Metrolink tram system opened in 1992, linking the Manchester–Bury and Manchester-Altrincham rail lines with a surface connection between Piccadilly and Victoria stations; it also served the G-MEX exhibition hall (the former Central Station). Although the main purpose of Centreline had disappeared, Metrolink did not serve the office area round King Street or the Deansgate and St Ann's Square shopping areas. The bus service was retained in a reduced form resembling the old 5, but the Dominos were withdrawn and 15 of them were scrapped in 1998.

Centreline underwent various changes between 1992 and 2002, with evening and Sunday services run for a time by several operators. However, it lost its prominence following the opening of Metrolink. The basic daytime service, run by GM Buses since deregulation in 1986, continued with this company's successors until Metroshuttle replaced it in September 2002.

Enter Metroshuttle

The city Centre has undergone a major resurgence since the early-1990s. There has been significant growth across the retail, leisure and further education centres, together with a runaway success in apartment living, compared with a time when hardly anybody lived in the centre. Major rebuilding in the St Mary's Gate/Corporation Street/Arndale Centre area following the IRA bomb in July 1996 has made this one of the major shopping destinations of the centre.

All these places need to be connected by public transport. In addition, cross-city services had virtually ceased after deregulation, and the closure of the top section of Market Street to buses in 1996 further separated the northern and southern bus networks. Stewart Threlfall, Greater Manchester PTE's service planning officer, says the main justification for Metroshuttle was major new office development in the Spinningfields area west of Deansgate — previously an area of poor public transport accessibility. 'The catalyst was definitely the Spinningfields development,' he says. 'Everything revolved round it. The contracts for the routes stipulated that all of them must pass through Spinningfields.'

Metroshuttle is a partnership between GMPTE, Manchester City Council, National Car Parks and the property developer Allied London. First Manchester — which operates them using 18 Optare Solos (10 with Mercedes engines, eight powered by Cummins) based at its Queens Road depot — provides a marketing and publicity contribution. The free services cost £1.2million a year.

The routes described

Route 1 (orange) starts on Piccadilly Station approach, which, since the rebuilding scheme of 2001/02, has only been open to buses, police and emergency vehicles. Barriers, activated by numberplate recognition, protect entry and exit. From here, it generally follows the post-1992 Centreline, serving the King Street office area, the St Mary's Gate shopping focus, the Chorlton Street National Express coach station and the northern end of the universities' campuses. Since 2005, there has been a peak-hour extension into the Spinningfields development. Frequency is every 5 min between 07.00 and 19.00 Monday-Saturday, and every 10min 10.00 to 18.00 on Sundays.

Route 2 (green) begins at the new Shudehill bus/tram/car park interchange on the northern edge of the city centre. Until January, it started at Victoria, which is now the first major calling point. It then serves numerous city centre destinations to the south of Route 1, including Deansgate and Oxford Road stations, the Museum of Science & Industry and Spinningfields, but then meets up with Route 1 on Deansgate and St Mary's Gate. It was revised when the 3 was introduced, which replaced it in the Peter Street and Princess Street areas.

Route 3 (purple) starts at the top of Piccadilly Station approach and follows Route 1 past Piccadilly Gardens to Oxford Street, then runs west to Spinningfields and across the River Irwell to Salford Central station. This reflects the increasing rejuvenation of the Salford side of the 'regional centre'. GMPTE has arranged for the

Right: Northern Counties-bodied Dennis Domino 1755 (C755 YBA) on Centreline route 5 in May 1996. It is in the GM Buses South fleet, which Stagecoach acquired four months earlier, and carries 'a Stagecoach subsidiary' lettering beneath its GMS logos. ALAN MILLAR

Your regular Metroshuttle bus is being serviced today.
If you are unsure which service this bus is, just ask the driver!
Metroshuttle

Above and right: Besides the Optare Solos branded in orange, green and purple, First Manchester 40335 (ML02 OGE) is available for use on any of the three routes and carries this imaginative explanation of its role. HOWARD WILDE

station to be open all day and into the late evening. It previously had a largely peak-hour service. Neither the 2 nor 3 operates on Saturdays, but both run every 10min between 07.00 and 19.00 on weekdays and between 10.00 and 18.00 on Sundays.

The most recent change has resulted from the controversial major city centre bus re-routing following the opening of the Shudehill. Manchester City Council has closed the Corporation Street/Cross Street route through the centre during peak shopping hours, to eliminate pedestrian/vehicle conflict and reduce the significant accident rate. Previously, this was buses-only between 08.00 and 18.00.

Metroshuttle route 2 continues to operate along the southern end of Corporation Street, and both routes 1 and 2 are admitted to St Mary's Gate via transponder-operated rising bollards. Many bus routes have been diverted from Corporation Street/Cross Street into the already congested Deansgate, which could affect the reliability of Metroshuttle. The closures are being promoted by experimental traffic orders, which means that evidence on the effects can be collected before considering permanent orders and holding a public inquiry into possible objections.

In this context, the 'regional centre' now has a complete relief route around it, and it remains to be seen whether this will be used to remove the remaining through traffic along streets such as Deansgate. The present situation is a far cry from the 'traffic cell' system with through public transport spines that was envisaged many years ago when the relief route was planned.

A testbed for cleaner vehicles

Because they have long served pedestrianised areas, both Centreline and Metroshuttle have played host to zero-emission buses. In 1975, electric Seddon midibus EX62 powered by lead-acid batteries, entered experimental service, but did not last long owing to the heavy batteries and other limits to the technology at that time. It now resides in the Museum of Transport.

In 2001, GMPTE decided to trial clean technology on shuttle buses in town centres. Hybrid technology was chosen, and one of the Solos on Metroshuttle (40336) had its engine replaced by an electric motor, battery and top-up diesel generator. The bus is able to run on electric power only for about half the time, and suffers no loss in performance or range compared with a standard Solo. The Energy Savings Trust, GMPTA and Eneco shared its development cost of over £250,000.

After entering service in 2004, and achieving a 66% availability, it is being upgraded to the same standard as six Solos delivered to Merseytravel in late 2005, which incorporated improvements based on experience with 40336. Passenger and driver perception has been good. But a decision has yet to be made about whether to purchase or convert more hybrid buses, or to investigate converting buses to inductive power transfer, where batteries are charged by driving without contact over a roadway grid — thus dispensing with the diesel generator.

Since route 3 was introduced, Metroshuttle ridership has climbed to 40,000 per week, and should exceed the 1.4million annual total last recorded.

Stewart Threlfall thinks operating hours could be extended to cover late night shopping, but he does not feel that it could serve Manchester's burgeoning night-time economy. 'It would need a different route network and there are important security requirements which would have to accompany this type of service, as they do on the present Nightbus network radiating from the "regional centre",' he says.

Metroshuttle has also received an international accolade. Readers of regional newspapers in the Netherlands voted Metroshuttle (along with Metrolink, which is also free within the 'regional centre' to holders of rail tickets), as the public transport measure they would most like to see introduced to reduce air pollution. It has been calculated that the services stop 2.5tonnes of nitrogen dioxide and 0.3tonnes of harmful particulates from entering the atmosphere each year.

Right: Metroshuttle Solos in all three route colours enter Cross Street/Corporation Street from St Ann's Gate, led by orange 40331 (ML02 OGA). PHIL HALEWOOD

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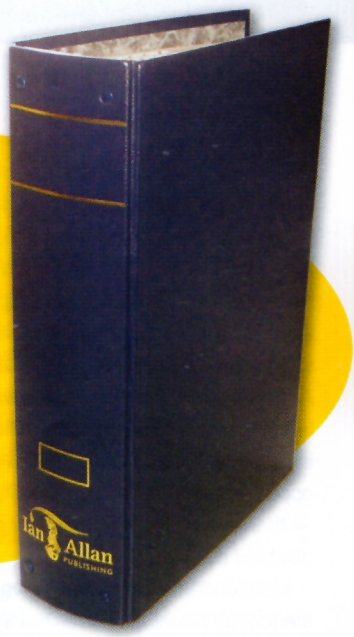

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Independents on a Welsh march

It is now two years since KMP of Llanberis challenged Arriva on two of its biggest routes in north-west Wales. RHODRI CLARK reports on a resurgence of independent operators, which was unthinkable even five years ago

For nearly a century, Crosville and its successor Arriva Cymru marched westwards across North Wales, opening new routes and acquiring local operators. But the tide has turned. Arriva's Welsh territory is shrinking, after it failed to recapture contracts in Anglesey, north Powys and elsewhere. After lean years of schools work and minor contracts, independents have identified new commercial opportunities — most in competition with Arriva — thanks partly to free travel for pensioners and disabled people.

Independents argue that Arriva shot itself in the foot by merging its Welsh and North West businesses in February 2002, two months before the free travel scheme began. By moving senior management from Llandudno Junction to Merseyside, they believe Arriva is missing new opportunities. 'They're going on past figures,' says Eric Jones of Express Motors. 'Since the concessionary scheme, passengers have trebled. Where we had a half-empty bus, now we've got a full bus.'

Arriva disagrees. Bob Hind, its North West & Wales managing director, says: 'We have very strong local operational and management teams in Wales. Some back-office functions were relocated to Liverpool to reduce costs. Arriva was the first bus company operating in Wales to respond to the opportunities presented by concessionary travel — expanding and extending services and introducing low-floor vehicles on many routes.'

Arriva remains the region's biggest operator, covering 88% of the network with 600 employees and a peak requirement of 233 vehicles. And Bob Hind says none of the five independents featured in this article has added anything new to the network. 'They are simply setting up in competition on long-established routes rather than exploring new travel opportunities or markets.'

While the independents say they can survive on lower profit margins than a plc like Arriva, Bob Hind believes the opposite to be the case. 'Everyday economic reality is that large companies can generally sustain lower margins as they can create economies of scale. Arriva can use its size to reduce costs by large-scale procurement, for example.'

Different responses to different challenges

Arriva has responded differently to the various challengers, throwing in the towel rather than competing with Townlynx between Mold and Flint, while — despite lower fares on KMP's route 9 — it increased fares on parallel routes. 'Our fares are set to reflect the costs of operating a service and not to respond to cheaper fares offered by a competitor,' explains Bob Hind.

It has changed its 5/5X several times since KMP's challenge, apparently discarding its Caernarfon-Llandudno business by truncating 5X to Bangor-Llandudno and leaving Caernarfon passengers with the slower 5 (which doubles back on itself for a mile on the A55 near Penmaenmawr to a roundabout to reach the eastbound carriageway). That increased journey times from 80 to 95min, in response to KMP's 80min (later relaxed to 90min). In 2004, Arriva hit back briefly with a new Bangor-Deiniolen-Llanberis service, competing with an hourly KMP tendered service.

Some fare payers shun Arriva where they have the choice, although the operator makes no difference to pensioners with free passes. Eric Jones thinks people are motivated by more than saving money. He says: 'We employ local people and the money stays in the area. That's what the public thinks. The money in Arriva goes to Sunderland. It's a small community here. Everyone knows each other.'

KMP's Ken Williams believes Arriva is alienating people by recruiting Polish drivers. In Welsh-speaking Gwynedd, customers whose second language is English sometimes find themselves trying to communicate with drivers whose second language also is English. 'Polish drivers are okay in towns where they do the same service all day, but here they don't know the place names. They frustrate people, which is a good thing for us,' he says. Bob Hind points out, however, that Arriva Cymru has only 12 Polish drivers. 'We do not believe that ethnicity should be a bar to employment,' he argues, adding that an independent survey of Arriva customers found that Llandudno and

Left: An October 2004 view of KMP L77 KMP, one of the first of its Wright Eclipse Urban-bodied Volvo B7RLEs in Deganwy, south of Llandudno, when route 9 ran right across Anglesey to Holyhead. It now terminates at Llangefni, around a third of the way across the island. JOHN YOUNG

Bangor garages had the group's highest overall customer satisfaction results (95%) in the UK.

Dafydd Price, of Padarnbus, says some people let Arriva buses go because they want to support the local company, which also restored the popular policy of hail-&-ride — scrapped after Arriva took over Purple Motors in 1998. But brand loyalty works both ways. 'Some people don't want to come with us,' he admits. 'Perhaps there are families who have worked for Crosville in the past.'

Local councils' attitudes are important in a sparsely populated area where so much, including new ticketing systems or real-time information, depends on public funding. Eric Jones thinks councils have changed their attitude to independents in the past two years. 'They're less focused on Arriva, especially since they moved the management to Liverpool.'

Above: Arriva Cymru 3355 (P938 MKL), a Northern Counties-bodied Volvo Olympian new to Maidstone & District, waiting to leave Bangor last March on service 5 to Llandudno. JOHN YOUNG

KMP: running half-hourly from Llandudno to Bangor

Ken Williams established Llanberis-based KMP as a coach business in 1979 and has run service buses since 1986. It has 29 vehicles, including four coaches and four double-deck schoolbuses. Its 36 employees include 31 drivers.

In May 2004, it launched hourly commercial service 9 (Holyhead-Bangor-Llandudno), adding 9A (Llanberis-Caernarfon-Bangor-Llandudno) four months later to provide a half-hourly Bangor-Llandudno service. It truncated the 9 to Llangefni during a driver shortage and the Holyhead extension was not reinstated, as loadings did not justify the extra vehicle required. This service is quicker than Arriva's Bangor-Llandudno route, partly because it does not detour off the A55. Arriva's fares are up to 40% higher, but around one third of KMP's passengers use free passes.

KMP acquired two new Wright Eclipse Urban-bodied Volvo B7RLEs for the original service, supplementing them with Dennis Darts to guarantee low-floor access, unlike Arriva. It now has six Eclipse Urbans (the latest arrived in February) and usually operates three Volvos and two Darts on each of the routes, which run between 07.00 and 19.00 on Mondays to Saturdays. Ken Williams says evening, Sunday and bank holiday services could not be justified commercially. KMP's other routes are tendered. They include the frequent shuttle between Llanberis and Pen y Pass, starting point of a popular footpath up Snowdon.

GHA Coaches: big in buses

Despite its name, Wrexham-based GHA Coaches — founded in 1988 and still a one or two-coach operator until 1995 — has grown rapidly as a bus operator with around 100 vehicles. It is now the third largest non-group company in Wales, after Cardiff Bus and Shamrock Travel.

It moved into bus services in 1995 with a contract for twice-weekly market day services from Ruthin to Wrexham. GHA has since won contracts in Wales and neighbouring areas of England. Its buses run as far west as Barmouth, on two tendered Wrexham-Barmouth return trips on Sundays on the X94 TrawsCambria route.

Despite its relatively large size, it runs only two commercial services — a Wrexham local and the 555 (Wrexham-Llangollen), launched in the late-1990s on the intermediate hour to existing operator Bryn Melyn. Both operators have since doubled their frequencies but retain even spacing between services. GHA still uses Mercedes minibuses, but manager Gareth Davies says loadings justify a switch to Dennis Darts when resources become available.

The Wrexham local — hourly route 23 to Summerhill — came with the acquisition of Hanmer's Coaches five years ago. Arriva operates a similar route (21) and has increased its frequencies to three per hour. Even so, GHA's fares are 15 to 20% cheaper and it claims that loyal passengers will wait for the Hanmer's service.

Left: Most of GHA's bus routes are operated under contract to local authorities. Plaxton President-bodied Dennis Trident DA51 GHA wears Denbighshire Vale Rider livery for the Denbigh-Llangollen route. BARRIE GILBERT

Left: Express Motors EM04 ORS, the only Optare Spectra-bodied VDL DB250 in Wales, leaving Bangor for Blaenau Ffestiniog on route 1. LES LONG

Express Motors: buses booming with free travel

Express Motors, based near Caernarfon, celebrates its centenary in 2008. It returned to local bus work in 1986, after 16 years, with one-third of the contract for service 1 (Blaenau Ffestiniog-Caernarfon), which it shared with Jones of Blaenau Ffestiniog and Crosville Cymru.

When the three-year contract expired, Express took on the service commercially, later extending some workings to Bangor.

Last year, this hourly service faced a new rival on the Porthmadog-Caernarfon-Bangor section with the expansion of Arriva's hitherto once daily TrawsCambria long-distance service to two-hourly. However, proprietor Eric Jones says the overall increase in frequency has attracted more custom for both operators.

The free travel scheme led Express Motors to withdraw from schools contracts and reduce its coaching business to concentrate on service buses, winning local bus contracts in Porthmadog and Barmouth. Out of 34 vehicles, only 10 are coaches; it employs 44 people, 27 of them drivers.

Last summer, it launched its first all-new commercial service, X1 (Blaenau Ffestiniog-Llandudno), which requires one bus and starts and ends the day in Porthmadog; it offers free daytime connections between Blaenau and Porthmadog on service 1. The X1 runs at almost the same times as Conwy Valley trains and about 70% of its passengers ride free. Intended initially as a summer-only service, it continued through the winter.

On 8 April, Express launched new commercial service X2 (Bangor-Dolgellau), plugging a perceived gap in Arriva's TrawsCambria service. It uses one of two new Optare Solos — the other is for Porthmadog local work.

Left: Padarnbus R870 ACC, a Plaxton Pointer-bodied Dennis Dart SLF new to KMP, in Bangor in January this year. KEITH MASON

Padarnbus: battling for Bethesda

Padarnbus started off as a Llanberis taxi firm in 1979, graduating to coach hire in 1984. Five years later, it won its first tendered bus contract, on Anglesey, then lost it to Crosville. Later it won contracts from Gwynedd Council. In 2003, it won a Conwy Council contract for service 75 (Llandudno-Llanfairfechan), which it surrendered in January because of rising costs, although it intends to compete for it again.

Last October, it launched its first commercial service, hourly one-vehicle route 77 (Bethesda-Bangor). In January it added the hourly 76, a second route with variations. Padarn bought two ex-KMP Dennis Darts for the service, and may buy a new bus if the experiment succeeds.

Proprietor Dafydd Price says local councillors asked him to lay on buses because they felt Arriva was unreliable. He says Arriva responded with low-floor buses, higher frequencies and lower return fares. He accuses Arriva of changing timetables to undermine Padarn. Both operators run hourly from the Gerlan district of Bethesda, and Arriva has changed its long-established xx.30 departures to xx.15 since Padarn instituted departures at xx.20. Arriva's new 7X leaves Bangor for Bethesda at xx.20, while Padarn's 76 leaves at xx.21. Arriva's Bob Hind says Padarn registered services 10min before Arriva's established departures. 'Arriva is merely responding in kind to Padarn's tactics,' he says.

Dafydd Price is happy with the response so far, but is unsure whether Padarn will add any more bus routes. 'I'm 60 now and I've had open-heart surgery. We'll see what the boys make of it,' he says. His two sons help run the business, which has three coaches and nine buses, mostly for schools contracts.

Townlynx: happy with five buses

Stephen Lee established Holywell-based Townlynx as a one-man band in 1996. Today, it has five service buses and five schoolbuses, with some overlapping duties, and employs seven drivers. The proprietor also drives, but has no ambition to expand.

'I can't see the point of chasing money all your life. I wanted to make a living for myself, and that's what I'm doing,' he says.

Unlike the others, he began competing head-on with Crosville Cymru, with hourly commercial service 28 (Mold-Flint), and subsequently won various tenders. In 2002, Arriva withdrew from Mold-Flint, citing Townlynx competition. Stephen Lee realises he may have made a canny move. 'I wasn't in a position to buy a lot of vehicles or employ a lot of drivers. I didn't think it would concern Arriva that much if I went on a small route. If I'd gone on a bigger route, they would have been a lot more cut throat.'

More than half the passengers on the 28 use free passes. He thinks the initiative has grown the market by more than the 6% predicted by Flintshire County Council. Even so, loadings didn't justify retention of a short-lived half-hourly 28 last year. Capturing contracts has enabled him to extend most 28s to Wrexham. 'We tendered for about two or three runs a day to Wrexham. We're doing eight runs to Wrexham, using a Dennis Dart and two Mercedes minibuses.'

Left: Townlynx DE04 XEZ, a Plaxton Beaver 2-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario, acquired for use on Flintshire Connexxions-branded tendered services around Mold. LES LONG

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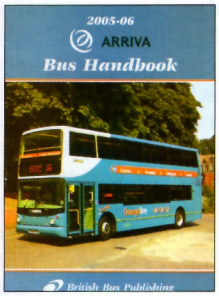

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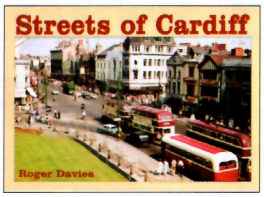

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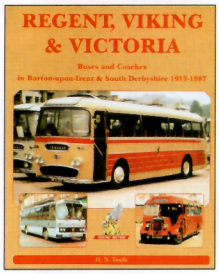

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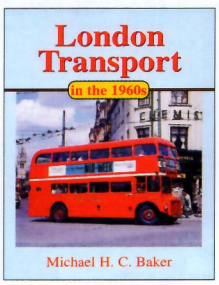

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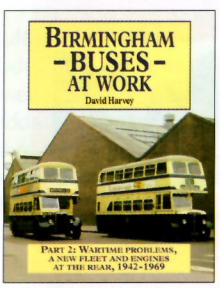

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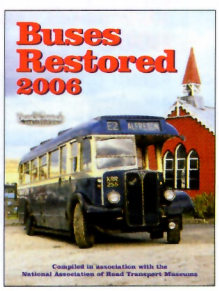

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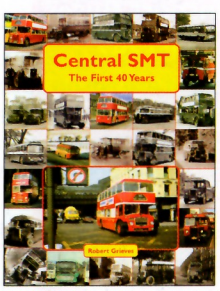

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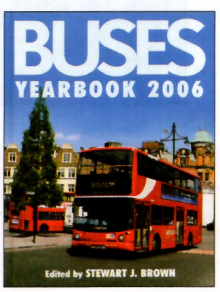

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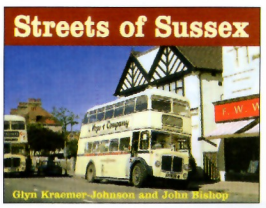

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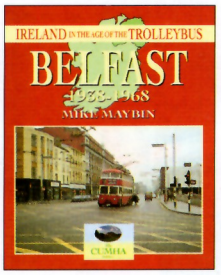

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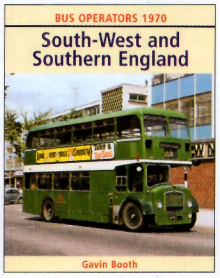

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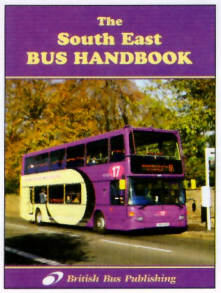

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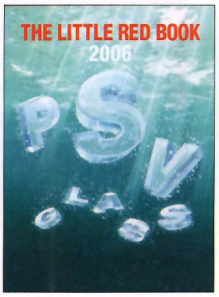

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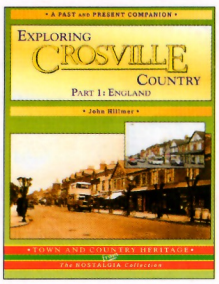

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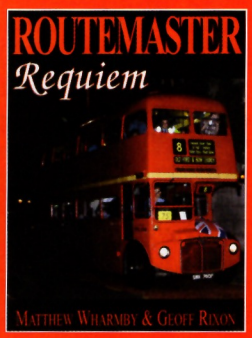

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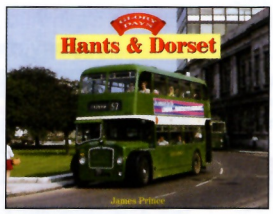

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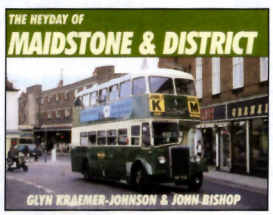

The Heyday of Maidstone & District

This book records the operations of the company and its fleet from the late 1950s, when it was still a subsidiary of BET, through to the mid-1970s, when the NBC's corporate identity started make an impact. The book will be of interest to the countless thousands who knew and used the services of M&D during the period covered by the book and will bring back nostalgic memories for many bus enthusiasts.

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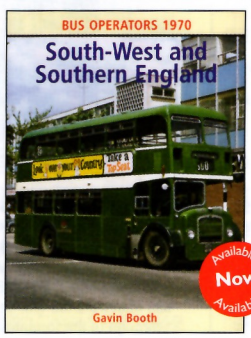

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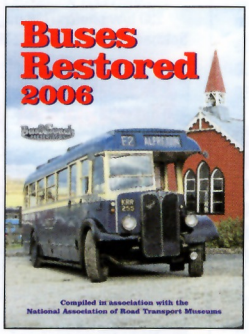

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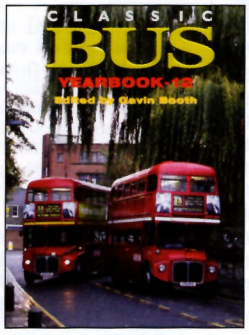

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Surfing all the way to Hinckley

RICHARD DELAHOY takes up a reader's challenge and also has news of several operator-focused websites

The letters column in recent issues has featured some debate about the merits of traditional, printed publicity for bus services as compared to electronic sources like websites.

When Ted Relton threw out a challenge to rival protagonist Alex Horner to use the internet to find out how to reach Midland Counties Publications' depot in Hinckley, reader Nigel McBride quickly stepped in to test the power of the net. By his own admission, Nigel has no specific knowledge of Hinckley so started with a clean sheet of paper. I don't have room for a full account of his quest, but can report that it *is* possible and was not that difficult to research. Nigel used a combination of **www.transportdirect.com** to identify likely bus routes, the East Midlands section of **www.traveline.org.uk** to obtain detailed timetables for those routes (he could also have got them from **www.arrivabus.co.uk**) and **www.multimap.com** to pinpoint the postcode and display a map of the surrounding area. This helped to reveal that the bus book sale location was on an industrial estate and so not likely to have a frequent all-day bus service, but Arriva's 5 stops about a 10min walk away.

Above: The Travel West Midlands fleet still includes some elderly MCW Metrobuses, including 24-year-old 2598 (POG 598Y) seen in West Bromwich in February. RICHARD DELAHOY

I can see the benefits of both traditional and electronic timetables and maps and I hope the industry will continue to supply both, playing to the strengths of the different mediums.

West Midlands buses galore

A while back I asked if any sites could match Brighton & Hove's **www.buses.co.uk** and Nottingham City's **www.nctx.co.uk** in offering pictures of every bus operated. Well, Tony Hunter has succeeded in an even bigger challenge, offering pictures of every vehicle in the Travel West Midlands fleet at **http://west-midlands-buses.fpic.co.uk/.**

The site not only features the entire TWM fleet, but also other operators in the area. Coverage is amazing and it's possible to search for particular types or individual buses, but it helps to understand the codes Tony uses. So, if Metrobuses are your delight, put 'MCW DR' in the search box to bring up no fewer than 352 photos. Makes the half a dozen shots I took on a recent visit seem rather tame by comparison.

Tony is to be congratulated on the huge number of pictures included. My favourite gallery is one simply called 'Why is my bus late, driver?' and the saddest was the demolition of Quinton garage, co-incidentally the only one I'd ever been inside, when I'd delivered ex-London DMS MLH 318L there back in 1980.

Darts and much more on Merseyside

Don't be put off by the name of the Merseyside Dennis Dart website at **www.dartslf.com**, as there are lots of pictures of other types of buses as well as the ubiquitous best-selling midibus, plus plenty of fleetlists of operators on Merseyside and a news page. It's unfortunate that the photo collections are simply listed by date and there's no search function, so that, for example, I couldn't find out if there are any pictures on the site of the ex-Arriva Southend buses transferred to the north west — a pity, as the random selection of pictures I browsed were of good quality and interesting.

From the Merseyside site I also found a link to Paul Holmes's tribute to Widnes and Halton buses at **http://www.holmesy.com/.** Here you'll find pictures of nine preserved buses from the Widnes/Halton fleets, a comprehensive photo gallery, current and historic fleetlists and useful links, including one to Halton Transport's own site at **http://www.haltontransport.co.uk/**. This is relatively basic in its design but offers full timetables for every route, maps, news, company history and another photo gallery, featuring pictures by Adam Davies, **http://www.geocities.com/haltontransportphotos/homepage**. My favourite shot is Paul Holmes's view of Widnes 39, a 1935 Leyland Tiger LT7, being started up in the St Helens Transport Museum (**www.hallstreetdepot.info/**) in October 2004. The cloud of exhaust smoke has to be seen to be believed.

Staying in the north west, we said in February Fleet in Focus that UK North doesn't have a website. Well, perhaps not quite true as another persistent reader, Martin Latus, tracked it down to **www.thestudentbus.com** where he found some basic company and network information. By the time I looked, though, the site hosting had been suspended, so try for yourself and see if it has been restored.

Finally, a couple of recently updated sites worth visiting include **www.oxfordbus.co.uk** — now featuring faretables (another of my hobby-horses) — and **www.yellowbuses.co.uk**, showing evidence of the new Transdev ownership.

*As usual, links to the featured sites are available at **http://efe.showbus.com/web** and I can be reached at **buses@signal-training.com**. Thanks to Kevin Duggan, Tony Hunter, Nigel McBride, Martin Latus and Mark Lyons for their help with this column.*

Some of the varied vehicles that DAVID BEARDMORE photographed while visiting the mainland and islands of western Scotland last August.

Above: Stagecoach Western 52262 (M 162 CCD), a Plaxton Interurban-bodied Volvo B10M seen at Brodick Pier, wears this special livery for tours of the island of Arran.

Below: Across the Firth of Clyde from Arran, Stagecoach Western maintains an updated version of traditional A1 Service livery for its frequent service between Ardrossan, Kilmarnock and Darvel. TransBus Trident ALX400 18001 (SF53 BZH) heads through Irvine for Ardrossan with advertising for Air Scotland, a Greek-connected airline that ran into financial trouble last year.

Above : Hebridean Transport was awarded the Western Isles Council contracts for services linking Harris and Lewis two years ago. It uses full-size coaches on most journeys, but also operates Mercedes-Benz Sprinter MX54 VWJ, seen leaving the South Harris village of Rodel, with St Clement's Church on the left. Road signs in the Outer Hebrides use Gaelic spellings.

Left : Remoteness from scrapyards means that past generations of Hebridean buses quietly rot in these remote extremities of the British Isles. RLS 466T, an Alexander Y-type Ford R1014 new to Alexander (Midland) as its MT66, has become a store shed in the wilds of Lewis.

Below left: Although based in the former Cunningham's Bus Service garage in Paisley, David Dean's Classique Coaches specialises in leisurely tours of the Highlands and Islands in immaculately restored coaches. Plaxton Panorama Elite-bodied Leyland Leopard UUF 329J — painted in the livery of a famous Pullman train — was one of 25 new to Southdown in 1971 and was photographed in Girvan, south Ayrshire.

The Gallic charm of French rural buses

Exiled Londoner ERIC STUART enlightens us of the spasmodic experience that is the typical country bus in southern France

France is noted for its excellent public transport services, but its reputation needs to be viewed with reservations.

Lyon — France's third largest city — is just inside the Rhône department (equivalent of a British county), with three other departments adjoining. Most urban buses stop at the municipal boundary or just beyond; a few extend into the countryside. Most buses from places outside the municipal area are operated by the respective department, others by national rail operator SNCF along rail routes at train fares. Contractors provide these buses, often in the network livery. Some follow the routes of former rural (often steam) trams that linked town and country, and still stop at old stations.

I live in a typical small rural town about 45 miles east of Lyon in Isere department. There is a main country road to the city, with intermediate communities lying along and on either side of it. Other roads head south toward the Grenoble-Lyon railway, and there are about seven buses a day between Grenoble and Lyon airport.

Most rural buses are primarily for schoolchildren, with even regular routes influenced by school timetables. French children spend longer at school than British children and generally have a half day on Wednesday, so rural French bus timetables have different times for Monday/Tuesday/Thursday/Friday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday (if a service operates) and market days (which vary from place to place), being further influenced by all school holidays, *jours de fêtes* and 'August' (see next).

Some villages are served by connecting taxis, which must be booked in advance.

There may be two or three morning trips about the same time, serving different villages and schools. The midday trips on Wednesdays usually mean fewer or no evening trips that day. Market day buses serve places not reached on other days. Sunday service is usually non-existent, occasionally sparse. 'August' — when some services are suspended or reduced and urban services are cut by half — used to run for four complete weeks from the last week of July, rather than a calendar month, but now often includes all July as well.

Rural buses are all fairly modern. Many have central exit doors, which are rarely used. At least 50% only undertake two revenue-earning trips a day, with an equal amount of light running for vehicles and driver, and for no more than five days a week. Hardly economic in limited terms, but they must save myriads of individual parental car-trips. At various times of day, the vehicles congregate in depots or in odd places in towns and villages around the department. I know of one bus that apparently spends 20hr a day parked up and more at weekends and holidays.

The timetables are as erratic as some of the old rural tram and narrow-gauge lines. A route can have five different timetables in a week. To check the service, you need a calendar and an awareness of school holidays. Many routes have clear bus stops, bearing the name of the stop and timetables of the services stopping there, often with a reasonable shelter. However, it took me five months to find out about other mysterious trips, stopping elsewhere than at bus stops and heading off in other directions, that do not appear in published timetables.

There are special weekly shopping trips, collecting people from nearby villages for a couple of hours in town. The timetable for the trunk Lyon route states that one trip each way connects with another company's bus from/to a large town in the adjoining department. But information about that service is hard to come by. The tourist information office, which sells bus tickets, denied any knowledge of such a route. I found no bus stops on the apparent route.

I eventually discovered it had fooled me by travelling an indirect route. I found a few bus stop signs on the route, but the only timetable looks ancient and is illegible from exposure to the sun. The building adjacent to this bus stop and timetable also has an older enamel bus-stop flag screwed to it. This building seems once to have been a café or bar. Over the door is a stencilled 'STOP' sign, protruding over the road. I assume it used to be internally illuminated to flag the bus down, so that passengers could wait inside the bar. What a great idea.

Convoluted airport connection

Some personal journeys provide examples of odd occurrences. I live about 40 minutes' drive from Lyon Airport, but travelling there by bus or train is easier said than done. No local bus connects with the Grenoble-Lyon Airport service, the nearest missing a connection by 20min, which would entail at least a 2hr wait halfway. Although my local service passes the end of the road to the airport, the nearest stop is three miles from the airport.

There are buses to Lyon at about 07.30/08.30, midday and 17.00 from Monday to Saturday (plus some short workings and a Sunday return trip). I took the midday bus to central Lyon, passing and seeing the airport en route, then the shuttle back to the airport, almost doubling the mileage and quadrupling the fare. On the journey to Lyon, the local bus detoured to pick up schoolchildren and then ran 15min late. Although it was a Wednesday, this variation was not shown in the timetable.

My return flight was late, so I did not have time to undertake the outward journey in reverse, as I would miss the last bus of the day. I took a taxi from the airport to the village nearest to the end of the airport road, paying an inflated fare for the journey as the driver said he was only supposed to take people into the city.

Left: A Czech-built Irisbus Ares in Trans Isere livery passing through La Tour du Pin on a wet August day. ERIC STUART

The bus driver looked surprised to see anyone hailing him, apparently assuming that everybody had got on in Lyon. Just before reaching my hometown, the bus failed to make the timetabled detour to a large village. There was no one to drop off and the driver must have assumed no one would be waiting there to get on. The bus then continued its journey, with 15 miles still to go, 10min early. This detour is now advertised as 'on request'.

A week later, I travelled on the only bus of the day on another rural route. There were only two passengers (a typical non-school load). We called at all timetabled points, despite no one boarding or alighting until the town at the other end. At my destination, the driver — displaying typical French kindness — got off the bus and walked to the end of the road to show me the return pick-up point.

On another occasion, I waited in vain at the town centre stop for the bus. Fortunately, I knew a short cut to the second stop at the local school, where the bus was waiting. I asked if it still went to the town centre. 'Normally,' replied the driver. He then gave me three reasons why he had not gone there. It was the last day before the summer holidays; few children were still at school; and the road at the stop got congested. All were true, but no consolation for intending passengers. Next time I used his bus, the driver asked if I would be returning from the town centre that evening; it seems he was going to miss it out again otherwise.

Incidentally, the town centre bus stop has an enamelled combined bus stop sign and timetable for another route. The enamel timetable looked at least 50 years old. The enamel sign was covered by one in vinyl-like material, which looked about 25 years old. I doubt if either bore any relation to present day services, but who knows?

Five-digit route numbers

The Lyon urban transport map features the departmental rural routes that enter the city. It shows my local route as 198 and some buses carry a Lyon-style '198' route number board. In fact, 198 is a family of routes, numbered 1980, 1981, 1982 etc as variants of the trunk route. There is even a limited-stop service, which Lyon calls '198A Express' and the department '1980 Express'. Buses with dot-matrix destination indicators show the four-digit route number and sometimes intermediate points in sequence, rather than just the destination. Hard to read on an approaching bus. One departmental bus route serving Lyon has a five-digit route number. Quite a few buses — most are confined to school runs — display only an A4 sheet of paper with printed route information.

Zonal fares are cheap. The 40-odd mile trip to Lyon costs about £2.70 single. There are no return fares, but day and other season tickets valid for unlimited journeys. However, day tickets for many routes are virtually only return tickets, since more than one return trip in a day is almost impossible — sometimes it is not possible even to make one return trip the same day.

Buses to Lyon have three ticket machines: one for the driver to use, one for season ticket holders to validate their smartcards and one for the few internal Lyon urban trips that the bus covers. One of my journeys was enlivened for about 15min, while a young woman argued that her mother was entitled to a reduction because of the card she held, while the driver disagreed. All this going on while the bus continued along the road.

Drivers normally issue tickets from a machine, but one trip I made involved the driver painstakingly writing out a small paper ticket with carbon paper copy. The original was then stapled by a hand-held broken plastic stapling machine to a credit-card size blank card ticket, which was then solemnly presented to me. Each ticket took at least 2min to issue, causing us to depart late.

I have a bus timetable for the area for 1951. The main service between here and Lyon is slightly inferior in speed from that advertised then, despite road improvements. The companies operating the service seem much the same. The main bus operator then, as now, having the same name as the original local steam tram operator.

Next time you see or read of a TGV train dashing from city to city in a couple of hours, remember that it could well take far longer for travellers to get from the station to home on a French rural bus.

FENTON FILE

MIKE FENTON urges us to treat Mercedes midis with more respect and finds one of few bodied by a now defunct coachbuilder

Over the years I have featured several Mercedes-Benz vehicles — not everyone's cup of tea, I know, but some interesting and uncommon makes of bodywork may be found on such chassis. To dismiss them merely as minibuses, as I know some do, is puzzling, especially as the seating capacity of a long wheelbase 814D, or equivalent Vario, is equal to that of the typical halfcab coach of the 1930s or 1940s — and I have yet to hear any of these being called minibuses.

Crest Coach Conversions, based at Adwick-le-Street near Doncaster, initially produced van conversions. Then, in 1997, it announced its intention to build the Impala body, formerly made by the failed Buscraft company of Birkenhead on 814L truck chassis, and at least three were sold under the Crest name in 1998/99.

In 2000, Crest also produced the coachbuilt body on Vario V579 JMY, which was of conservative styling but with an interestingly shaped windscreen, suggesting it had been adapted from another application. I photographed it twice in just over a year, on both occasions in the ownership of North Yorkshire independent Roaminey Travel of Pickering, and my shot shows it at York Races in August 2004. Whether more were built is a question I cannot answer, but I certainly know of no others from this company that, I believe, ceased trading towards the end of 2004.

YOU WRITE

To BUSES, PO Box 14644, Leven KY9 1WX or Fax 01333 340 608
or e-mail buseseditor@btconnect.com (Please provide your full postal address when writing letters (by email or post) for publication)

Industry needs to counter PTE lobbying

The claim by Nexus that it has been short-changed over free OAP travel (*Buses* March) *may* be justified, but we are entitled to ask, if this creates such a financial crisis, how does it hope to fund its proposed quality contracts? Only the most gullible would swallow the claim that this can be done without massive increases in funding.

Its proposed cut of 12% in services already supported, the restriction on concessionary travel and the fares increases of 33.3% for children and 50% for teenagers seriously undermines the claim that it needs powers to set fares and service levels to reverse the decline in bus use.

In his Inside Track article in the same issue, Brian Cox brings common sense to the debate with a realistic appraisal of the issues. It is to be hoped that the industry will heed his call to up its lobbying performance to match that of the PTE Group.

The industry needs to mount an effective and sustained campaign to counter the claims by the pro-regulation groups. This should hammer home the positive benefits of the industry being freed from the twin shackles of regulation and public ownership. The innovative plan for Manchester recently revealed by Stagecoach, and FirstGroup's 'ftr' show there is no lack of innovation and original thinking. The figures of growth in adult passengers on Stagecoach services in Manchester, for example, provide a stark contrast with the pre-deregulation and PTE control era. And it is not just the large groups who have responded positively, I can think of several independents in this locality that are providing better services than existed during regulation and PTE influence. I am sure the same is true generally. It is a story worth making more widely known.

Despite his undoubted ability and determination, it cannot be left to Brian Souter alone. It should have the support and active participation of the whole bus industry. Can I suggest that operators — large and small — provide details of improvements they have effected to be included in a dossier for wider circulation? Perhaps this is something the Confederation of Passenger Transport could organise.

Finally, Brian Cox's quote from the PTEG website reminded me of the disdain for operator initiatives and the opposition to anything *not invented here,* which typified the PTEs and does little to encourage belief in the possibility of a genuine partnership if they have their way.

John Whittle
Yieldshields, Carluke

PTEs are thinking big on bus plans

I support PTE quality contracts so long as they do not interfere with any existing successful and high-quality routes in their particular area.

Perhaps it would be an idea to trial a route or routes that plug a gap in an existing network so that the concept can be tried out on a fairly small scale before money is committed to a larger scheme, as from the reading of the article in March *Buses,* the South Yorkshire and Nexus PTEs seem to be thinking big from the start.

I find it slightly odd that First and other groups are so hostile to the concept at this early stage. As a resident of a PTE area and a daily user of buses I have to say that things are far from perfect, not just with First buses but with certain other operators also, and although they are trying, the editorial image of the 30-year-old double-decker running late certainly rings true. It would seem that First would gain from the PTEs' proposals if they were to participate, certainly if the PTE bought the buses as was mentioned.

As a final thought, I don't see how a comparison can be made between Leeds, Sheffield etc and London. The circumstances of London are very different from anywhere else in the UK, as surely was evidenced by the fact that crew-operated Routemasters survived there until so recently.

Martin Latus
Morley, Leeds

GMPTE action is quite absurd

Your article 'Manchester bans most buses from shopping streets' (News, March) highlights the absurdity of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive continually saying it wishes to promote public transport, yet constantly making it less attractive. It also illustrates what has been happening for many years in central Manchester as buses are forced, more and more, to terminate in unsuitable narrow back streets, rather than have a proper bus station at Piccadilly Gardens like we used to have and where passengers want one to be.

Our organisation obtained from bus passengers over 1,000 properly signed letters last autumn protesting against the proposed closure of Cross Street and Corporation Street to buses, with copies sent to Manchester City Council and GMPTE among others, yet apart from totally negative correspondence, both organisations completely ignored the wishes of the passengers. GMPTE is, of course, leading the campaign to have total control of bus services in Greater Manchester.

How right Gavin Booth of Bus Users UK is to say diverting services into already congested streets is a recipe for disaster. Bus operators have already seen a reduction of passengers and the new, highly expensive, badly designed 10-bay bus station at Shudehill (which also provides parking for 777 cars) must be the least used for its size and cost in the country.

Tony Fawthrop
Chairman,
Greater Manchester Transport Campaign
Bramhall, Stockport

Put accessibility before a good view

Mr Uden of Woking (You Write last month) is perfectly entitled to his rant about low-floor buses, 'European superstate masters. . . the disabled lobby and the brainwashed political elite' etc, etc. But he should not be allowed to mislead your readers by implying that buses are being somehow singled out on accessibility issues.

Modern trains are required to be disability compliant to a degree (including toilets, which is not a problem facing most bus operators) and licensing authorities tend to require taxis, when freshly licensed, to be wheelchair accessible.

In any event, I would place the right of a wheelchair user to access public transport above Mr Uden's 'right' to enjoy the passing scenery. The word omnibus, after all, derives from the Latin, loosely translated as 'for all' — including those with mobility problems.

Gwyn Griffiths
Crewe

Forward visibility could be better

Your letters about the TrawsCambria network and also your editorial last month struck a chord with me.

Admittedly I do not travel much by bus in this country, but when I do I have problems with the poor forward visibility. Ideally, one wants a high-floor bus, with the luggage rack behind the driver and no opaque blind. One rarely gets that, and the advent of low-floor buses on longer routes is making things worse. Yet when I travel in France, I usually find a high-floor bus, with no luggage rack, nor blind behind the driver, and excellent visibility.

Double-deckers would be ideal, but cannot be expected on all routes, so why do British operators not think to make forward visibility in single-deckers better?

Malcolm Chase
Buses Worldwide,
Fleet, Hants

We really want to sit alone

I read with interest Harry Barker's article on seating last month. I believe that the current moulded seats are the product of flawed market research. When asked, a majority of passengers say they would prefer individual seats. What they actually mean is that they do not want to sit next to anyone. The move towards a 2+1 layout will, no doubt, prove popular with many passengers for that reason.

It is a little addressed issue that one of the greatest deterrents to the use of public transport is being forced to share your journey with other people whom you cannot choose. This may sound anti-social or snobbish, but you wouldn't let many of the characters found on public transport near your car, let alone give them a lift in it. On the bus or train, you're stuck with them.

Clive Lawrence
Redhill

Pay heed to these important issues

It was good to see a number of important issues raised in April *Buses*. Andrew Braddock (Inside Track) highlighted the appalling state of bus stops in some areas and the waste of money on unused/unusable guidance kerbs. Harry Barker's article on passenger comfort and seating pointed out the poor design and spacing of too many seats in new buses, particularly those used for longer journeys.

Finally, and close to my heart, were Eric Baldock's justifiable gripes (You Write) regarding Traveline. I, and I expect many other readers, use Traveline for sourcing information but tend to know when the answer provided is nonsense, which in certain areas it all too often is. I pity any member of the general public using Traveline, as it must be very frustrating at times and I do indeed wonder how much this expensive service is actually used.

I hope that some of those with responsibility or influence in these matters will have read and taken note of the comments.

Clifford Martin
Maulden, Beds

Why is Xephos left on the shelf?

You have published a growing number of complaints about the huge difficulty of obtaining bus timetable information and, when obtained, its overall accuracy. I heartily agree with your correspondents' concerns. Bus timetables are now totally unobtainable in London. The new Isle of Wight timetable book, after years of providing a comprehensive service, now reverts to being a map-less collection of Vectis-only information. Stagecoach's website only provides PDF files, effectively the raw material for printed leaflets, and are often difficult to download or even read on-screen. Many operators only produce departure lists, perhaps adequate for regular local users but pretty useless for visitors and well nigh impossible if you are trying to get to and from a specific location.

Eric Baldock's scathing criticism of Traveline (April You Write) could easily be extended to Transport Direct, which draws its data from Traveline anyway, and the recently 'acclaimed' Transport for London site gives ridiculous answers for anything other than a very simple journey.

Meanwhile our Xephos project languishes in the doldrums because no one can come up with the cash to help us finish the job. Google reveals almost exclusively positive comment about the speed and scope of the system for user-friendly delivery of journey planning, full timetables and geographical search facilities.

From around 1.3million enquiries a year (small but significant), we get about three complaints. Such complaints recognise that (without funding) we cannot give every snippet of available information and challenge us to do better. Geographical complaints have been critical that we do not supply data for, say, Hemel Hempstead (Hertfordshire — sic!), on our Herefordshire website.

Many local authorities have at least one full-time member of staff to support Traveline, while my colleague updates the whole of Hampshire, taking about one day a month. And he always gets it right. And, yes, we have repeatedly approached government, local authorities and the bus industry at the highest level to suggest the adoption of Xephos; a single central database of bus timetable etc and been turned down, usually for spurious and political reasons.

We can offer a fully populated and managed Xephos (nationally) for about £250,000 or even Xephos 'lite' for about £100,000. Taxpayers and bus users are probably paying in the region of £30million per annum in up-front and hidden costs for a poor service. Does anyone care?

Peter White
Xephos Project, Isle of Wight

The value of appropriate publicity

Further to my letter concerning timetable availability (You Write August), I feel that two somewhat eccentric letters subsequently published demand a response.

Mr Relton, (You Write November) suggests that all should aspire to the quality and content of the Munich timetable. I am not familiar with this publication; it certainly sounds comprehensive, but I question whether seekers after information about times and routes really want fleet lists and the opening times of public baths. Such additional information may be of interest to some, but is it really necessary in a timetable if the end product has to be 500 pages thick and of A4 format? And on the subject of A4, Mr Relton needs to get out more in the UK, where many operators and councils have embraced the format. As somebody who uses public transport, I am impatient for these entities to abandon the A4 fad and return to producing portable timetables, but not as impatient (and frustrated) as I am with trying to use public transport in those parts of the country where publicity is piecemeal and the route map unheard of — but let's not mention Cambridgeshire.

Mr Horner (You Write February) goes to another extreme by suggesting that the printed timetable is no longer necessary. No doubt for those who use only the same high-frequency service every day there is no need for a timetable. No doubt real-time information at the bus stop is all that is needed if one is already waiting at the bus stop. No doubt an itinerary may be devised by reference to websites. But in all these cases what is missing is access to information about options should anything go wrong or, heaven forbid, should the traveller's requirements change en route through either necessity or whim.

Would Mr Horner suggest to a car driver that a map is unnecessary owing to the presence of road signs, or that road signs are unnecessary owing to the availability of in-car navigation systems? Must the traveller always plan a journey in advance and not have access to information about options for deviation or variation of schedule?

The truth is that each source of information has its use, and that what suits one person or occasion may not suit another. That there is a variety of sources and styles of information can only encourage bus use (it certainly seems to work with the railways); adopting a dogmatic approach that effectively reduces the availability of information will discourage bus use. However, no satellite navigation system, Traveline, website or real-time bus stop display will open up the opportunities for adventure, discovery and flexibility afforded by map, timetable and (perhaps another subject for discussion) some true integration of services, ticketing and publicity.

A. N. Mather
Romsey

Real source of praise for Torbay guide

In last month's Publicity Matters, Christopher Carter says of Torbay's timetable that 'it has won the praise of the National Timetable Recognition Body, which describes it as "probably the finest timetable produced by any unitary authority in the country".'

I have never heard of such a body. However, in my bus and rail timetable website (www.barrydoe.co.uk) under the Best Timetables of the British Isles section, I just happen to say, regarding the Torbay timetable, that it is 'probably the finest timetable produced by any unitary authority in the country'. Sounds familiar?

My website is in the public domain and is viewed by over 1,000 users a week, and I have no objection to people quoting from it, but it would be appreciated if true credit is given to my opinions.

Barry Doe
Bournemouth

Discovered in Durban museum

Above: The Johannesburg Guy double-decker and single-deck Durban AEC Swift in the DHTS museum last year. MIKE WALKER

Andy Izatt's photo of Mr Moses's Leyland Tiger OPS4 still in service in Durban at the time of his visit is most interesting (You Write March) since when Martin Curtis and I visited Durban it was out of service for a few days and we were unable to see it.

However, Andy also refers to the former Johannesburg Guy six-wheeler that he missed on his visit, but is at the Durban Historic Transport

Museum, and this indeed we did see on our visit to the museum. We were told that it is used regularly by the museum for private charters, along with a 1959 AEC Regent V. Sadly, the 1958 six-wheeler's original Rolls-Royce engine was replaced by a 12.3litre AEC AV760 in 1972. Amazingly, considering only 30 were built, the shell of another one resides at the drive-in movie theatre behind the museum where, having given up its mechanical parts to keep the museum's example on the road, it serves as a ticket office/refreshment bar.

Andy mentions the Durban AEC Swifts that he also missed, and I am pleased to say that one of these is also kept at the museum. Built in 1973, it is 12.5m long, seats 76 with 22 standing and has a 220hp AH760 engine.

Mike Walker
Dinder, Somerset

Vince Coaches and Weavaway

As the last employee of Vince Coaches (Fleet News England & Wales, March), I would like to make clear that Mr Weaver of Weavaway did not purchase the name Vince Coaches or Vince of Burghclere. What he did buy were the vehicles, which passed immediately to Moseley's in the South, and the diary. He also had the phone number diverted to his office, Mr Vince has retired and that is the only reason we closed.

Roger M. Tidy,
EngTech, AMIMI, AMIRTE, CAE, AMSOE

Lough Swilly picture appeal

I am currently researching the early history of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company, particularly the 1930 to 1950 period, in preparation for a forthcoming volume in the Colourpoint *Buses in Ulster* series.

I know that enthusiasts from Great Britain visited the company's territory in Londonderry and Co. Donegal during this period, and took photographs. Some of these collections have since been dispersed and are difficult to locate. If any readers have photographs of the company's vehicles from this early period, I should be most grateful if they would make contact with me. Even contemporary railway photos may be of value if they show any of the company's buses in the background.

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Time for Arriva to brighten its act

With David Martin shortly to take over from Bob Davies as Arriva's chief executive, I am sure he will want to stamp his identity on the group's activities. I would like to make a couple of suggestions for him. 1) Replace aquamarine with a colour that is more modern and more able to withstand the rigours of modern day bus operation.

2) Replace drive-through bus washes with static ones, to ensure that buses are washed properly.

I don't like to get involved in arguments over liveries. This is, after all, a commercial decision for the directors of the company. It is not for us to bemoan the fact that Road Car's pleasant green and yellow will soon be replaced by Perth's corporate swoops. We do know, however, that the buses will continue to be well presented by their new owner, and this is more important than the particular set of colours.

Arriva's fleet presentation in Co. Durham, by contrast, leaves a great deal to be desired, with all but the newest vehicles giving the impression of a company going through the motions of running buses — drab, dull and unexciting. Could anyone at the top actually look at a line-up of the company's vehicles and say 'I am proud of the way this fleet looks'? Even in Durham, the latest city to benefit from wholesale vehicle replacement and refurbishment, many tatty, aged and smoky buses are still operating on all-day services, including ex-London Olympians, Lynxes, Deltas, Vectas and even 25-year-old Metrobuses.

Go-Ahead, on the other hand, turns out exceptionally presented vehicles, whatever their age, as the pictures in *Buses* March clearly show, but the vehicle painters in the north-east must surely be tearing their hair out over the new livery.

Richard Cranmer
Heighington Village, Co. Durham

Real credit for London bus success

I will leave most of your correspondents (You Write March) to their views, but must just correct one point in the letter from Andrew Bosi — who does not identify himself, but was chair of the now closed Capital Transport campaign, once a serious campaigning organisation, but more recently merely the origin of sound bite-size criticisms of the Mayor's policies, to the delight of the *Evening Standard*.

Derek Turner was the man whose organisation delivered the congestion charge and had responsibility for the Transport for London road network, as managing director of street management. He was never in charge of London Buses. I was, from January 2001. So Mr Bosi's complimentary remarks about the improvements to the service, to the extent to which they are due, are also to be addressed to the same person he criticises roundly in his letter — me! That he does not know who's been in charge of what and when lends no credibility to his personal criticisms.

Actually, the credit for the renaissance of the London bus network is due to the Mayor, for his courage in pursuing the policies and supporting the funding, and to the people in London Buses and the operators who have delivered a 40% growth in passengers in five years. Real enthusiasts for buses should be delighted at seeing such a strong industry in London in contrast to years of decline.

Peter Hendy
Commissioner, Transport for London

Bendy buses versus double-deckers

My eye was caught by the banner headline on the front page of the London *Evening Standard* of 1 March – 'Bendy buses could be axed' – remarkable both in the prominence given to a bus-related subject and the idea conveyed, even though the eventual outcome remains to be seen.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone was responding to criticisms of articulated buses, the report mentioning blocking road junctions, encouraging fare dodging and 'creating a cattle-truck atmosphere' because of the shortage of seats within. He said: 'Bendy buses are still on trial. We have only had them for three years so the jury is still out and they may be withdrawn.'

Remarkably, the influences that first made the typical London bus a double-decker 150 years ago, quite early in the horsebus era, still apply. There were and are two key factors — London's cramped and congested streets and how best to carry large numbers of passengers through them. Even then it had soon been found that too big a vehicle was cumbersome. At first a few athletic young men would climb on to the roof to sit behind the driver of the rather box-like early buses, but before long there were 'outside' seats and later proper stairs. Coachbuilding skills kept weight down, in those days based on what two horses could pull, but creating an attitude that carried over into the motorbus era and for quite a while was reinforced by regulations.

Considering modern buses, it is self-evident that adding an upper deck nearly doubles the amount of passenger space for the amount of road space occupied. By contrast, the bendy bus is essentially a single-decker with a bus semi-trailer added on. The latter has to have a structure strong enough to be self-supporting as it is tugged around what may be uneven streets, requiring an extra axle complete with suspension and a complex turntable mechanism to join the two parts.

The double-deck bus is inherently much lighter than any single-decker of equal internal floor space. The reasons for this soon become evident if its construction is examined. In effect, the upper-deck seats are mounted on the equivalent of the roof of the single-decker, already quite strong for stress-related reasons. The upper-deck structure built around them has nothing to support but itself, hence it can be quite lightly-built — in principle almost akin to an umbrella — thereby also helping the bus to be stable despite being tall.

Amid its tragic consequences, the horrific terrorist attack on a London double-decker last July also demonstrated these characteristics. The bomb was exploded towards the rear of the upper deck, lifting the roof off completely and causing the upper-deck side panels to open out like folding wings, yet the basic structure of the rest of the bus remained largely intact.

Remarkably, a photograph taken soon after the event showed perhaps 10 or 12 survivors standing within the front part of the upper-deck, looking bemused but with little sign of injury. The force of the explosion, despite killing most of the people in its immediate vicinity, seems to have been dissipated to some degree in lifting the roof off, pushing the windows out and opening the sides, evidently saving several lives by relieving some of the pressure.

To return to my main point, I find it extraordinary that so little attention is paid to the weight of buses nowadays, something directly related to their energy consumption and hence not only running costs but also both pollution and the global warming effects.

How has the bus industry become so ignorant of a basic law of mechanics? *Force equals mass times acceleration* – that was a mantra I learned at school about 65 years ago. Put into day-to-day

language, every time a bus is accelerated after a stop, as happens hundreds of times each day, the effort required from the engine and hence the amount of fuel it needs is proportional to its *weight*, a concept of which any cyclist is aware. London Transport's engineers, and indeed many others, treated that as a paramount principle in those days, so why is it forgotten today?

Alan Townsin
Steventon, Hants

Understand the virtues of the RM

The saddest aspect of the Routemaster debacle is the bitterness and vitriol that has suddenly come out of the woodwork. I thoroughly agree with Adam Kelleher (You Write March) for his intelligent riposte to Andrew Braddock's insane diatribe in the February issue, but while I do have some sympathy for Chris Moyes's views, I also think the open season of silliness directed towards the RM indicates a lack of understanding of both its virtues and its position in PSV development history.

If the past 15 years hadn't happened and the RM had been phased out by the end of the 1980s, such phrases as 'those old heaps' would be invalid and the bus would have been rightly lauded for the three decades of sterling service it has given London. But in view of the turnout of many RMs during those last few years one can hardly argue with such insults.

Surely most of the RM's detractors are criticising the format of bus, i.e. open rear platform with conductor. So also those London travellers who regret its passing are mourning loss of that format, i.e. ease of access, hop on, hop off at will. But enthusiasts and those with any technical or historical knowledge mourn the type for what it is: a symbol of the 'fit for purpose' engineering and design ethic of the old London Transport, which was also a revolutionary advance on previous designs and which even now holds some lessons. If it hadn't been for Donald Stokes, the [rear-engined, front-entrance] FRM would have admirably continued that tradition and spared us the DMS fiasco. Would it still have attracted Braddock's ire?

Braddock's view that we are a nation obsessed by history is typical of the short termism that has dispensed with half a century's transport engineering know-how. His distaste for reference to the past conveniently sits with the current profit-making climate that ignores both the accumulated know-how and the long-term solution. He can't just step in with the benefit of hindsight and completely blot out history. The London bus has developed over decades and the LT decision to stay with the traditional format was based on years of research and experience. It tried every conceivable format: front/rear entrance; both together; a conductor in a ticket booth. Always that traditional format survived. Sadly, that level of development has long since ceased, the final nod from a manufacturer towards LT's needs arguably being manifested in the B15 Titan.

I also take some insult from Andrew Braddock's implied belittling of the efforts of thousands of personnel, especially those conductors who over decades have carried out their duties conscientiously and with pride. There were no uncollected fares on my bus. And far from RMs or the format tarnishing the reputation of bus travel in recent years, wasn't it Mrs Thatcher who said that any young man over 26 years old who found himself on a bus was a failure?

Public transport in a modern capital city is too important to be in the hands of local politicians and myriad private companies. Those in control should be answerable to central government as London Transport was. We need a modern equivalent of the Morrison/Ashfield bill. Roll on 1933! Interestingly, I read in March *Buses* that the New York authority is busily nationalising private bus companies in the interests of efficiency and value for money for taxpayers.

Barry Hitchcox
Wantage

London was out of step with progress

The Routemaster has been laid to rest and not before time. At the outset of its protracted service life, the RM was already an outdated double-deck bus design, when you consider what Leyland was offering to the bus operating managers at the same time.

As a 'provincial' Up North, I was mystified and surprised that our capital city was embarking on a massive replacement programme, including that of 70-seat trolleybuses, with an old-fashioned halfcab bus. It was not even pretty, having a rather ugly snout I thought at the time. Although it was well built and reliable, surely this was not the future bus to replace the elegantly proportioned RT. Had the normally progressive London Transport become stuck with its head in the sand?

Parallel to these developments, Newcastle Corporation Transport manager Frank S. Taylor was planning the future of his fleet and, with great foresight in the 1960s, replaced the varied existing bus fleet, and the large trolleybus fleet, with the latest and most up-to-date vehicle, the Leyland Atlantean. When he retired and passed over his undertaking to the Tyneside PTE, he left the city with a thoroughly up-to-date, and paid for, bus fleet suitable for one-man operation, and a reported £250,000 surplus to the council during his control.

In the 1980s, a second wave order for high-capacity double-deck Atlanteans, Fleetlines and Metropolitans instigated by the Tyne & Wear PTE provided a highly efficient and frequent feeder service to the new Metro system.

And as for London? Yes, a 'serious case of misplaced enthusiasm'. Andrew Braddock is right. 'Old fashioned conveyance' is an apt description of the Routemaster from its inception to its demise. Hasn't our whole culture become one for gloating over the past, including keeping old buses running in our capital city for 40 years?

Surely as one of the greatest capital cities in the world, we should have a state-of-the-art transport system. It isn't any wonder that our bus manufacturing industry has failed. It used to take the lead from London and LT's large replacement orders helped it do so. It is very late, but you cannot deny that the Metroline Enviro400s are lovely looking, impressive buses — and they are British made. Let's hope they succeed and counteract the flood of imported buses whose manufacturers have seized on the opportunity to replace what our goose head policies of the past have left for our public transport systems through lack of investment.

As a footnote, I would like to say that in 1977 I bought with friends from the Tyne & Wear PTE, a life-expired 1962 Atlantean — 221 JVK — for preservation. That bus, which I am pleased to say is still in pristine condition, would still look modern in today's bus scene — and it has a flat floor right through to the back axle one step up from the street.

What would world bus operators and overseas visitors think of the RML you showed at the bottom of p37 in February Pictureview? This is the 21st century for goodness sake.

Kenneth G. Hall
Newcastle upon Tyne

2million people already have Barclaycards
BARCLAYCARD
Isn't it time you had one?
Hundreds and hundreds of uses at thousands and thousands of places

Left: Typical of the buses that Newcastle Corporation bought in the 1960s is MCW-bodied Leyland Atlantean 233 (KBB 133D) of 1966, seen in PTE days as an overall advertisement for Barclaycard.

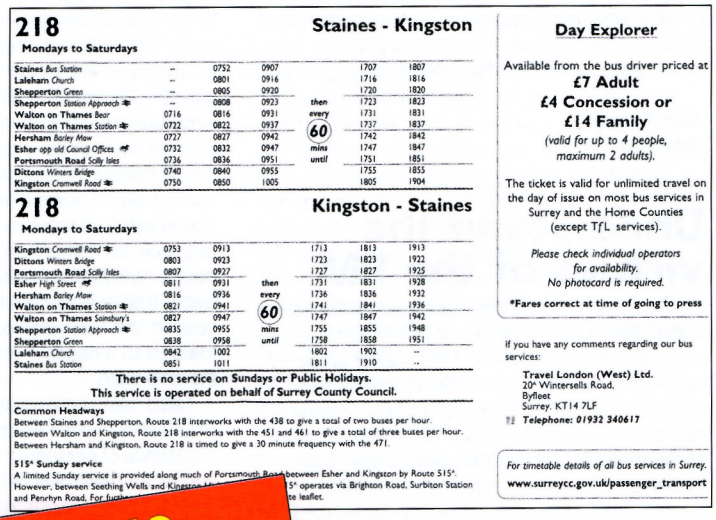
Headways, interworking and other bus-speak

STEPHEN MORRIS highlights the impenetrable nonsense that appears on bus publicity when operators forget to think like first-time passengers

I recently picked up a revised leaflet for my local bus route, Travel London's 218 (Kingston-Staines). I was slightly confused, as it looked like a revised timetable, but I couldn't readily find anything different on it. But what especially struck me was the wording of some actually very useful information, regarding other services running parallel with the 218.

I always have found it unacceptable that our most important trunk route, covering a largely urban corridor, is only hourly, but some time ago Travel London's predecessor, Tellings-Golden Miller, extended its Surrey-sponsored service 438 (Staines-Laleham) though to Shepperton, giving a welcome extra journey each hour. It doesn't go direct, but it doesn't add too much to the journey time and is more useful than the 218 if you want to go to Staines station or our local council offices, law courts and leisure centre. It's a useful addition to the local network and tends to be pretty dependable.

This new leaflet tells me of the 438 and of other services that parallel the route (though not the 555 and 556, which parallel it between Shepperton and Walton-upon-Thames station) with a little panel entitled 'Common Headways' and tells me the 218 'interworks' with the 438 (and various other services). Now if I wanted to get all technical, in fact the 218 doesn't really 'interwork' with the 438 anyway, as one uses Darts and the other Mercedes-Benz Varios (or Vario singular if we're really being picky). But that's not the point; the use of terminology only understood by people with a working knowledge of the bus industry is inexcusable and I had hoped it was a thing of the past.



218 Staines - Kingston

Mondays to Saturdays

Staines *Bus Station*	--	0752	0907		1707	1807
Laleham *Church*	--	0801	0916		1716	1816
Shepperton *Green*	--	0805	0920		1720	1820
Shepperton *Station Approach*	--	0808	0923	then	1723	1823
Walton on Thames *Bear*	0716	0816	0931	every	1731	1831
Walton on Thames *Station*	0722	0822	0937	60	1737	1837
Hersham *Barley Mow*	0727	0827	0942	mins	1742	1842
Esher *opp old Council Offices*	0732	0832	0947	until	1747	1847
Portsmouth Road *Scilly Isles*	0736	0836	0951		1751	1851
Dittons *Winters Bridge*	0740	0840	0955		1755	1855
Kingston *Cromwell Road*	0750	0850	1005		1805	1904

218 Kingston - Staines

Mondays to Saturdays

Kingston *Cromwell Road*	0753	0913		1713	1813	1913
Dittons *Winters Bridge*	0803	0923		1723	1823	1922
Portsmouth Road *Scilly Isles*	0807	0927		1727	1827	1925
Esher *High Street*	0811	0931	then	1731	1831	1928
Hersham *Barley Mow*	0816	0936	every	1736	1836	1932
Walton on Thames *Station*	0821	0941	60	1741	1841	1936
Walton on Thames *Sainsbury's*	0827	0947	mins	1747	1847	1942
Shepperton *Station Approach*	0835	0955	until	1755	1855	1948
Shepperton *Green*	0838	0958		1758	1858	1951
Laleham *Church*	0842	1002		1802	1902	--
Staines *Bus Station*	0851	1011		1811	1910	--

There is no service on Sundays or Public Holidays.
This service is operated on behalf of Surrey County Council.

Common Headways
Between Staines and Shepperton, Route 218 interworks with the 438 to give a total of two buses per hour.
Between Walton and Kingston, Route 218 interworks with the 451 and 461 to give a total of three buses per hour.
Between Hersham and Kingston, Route 218 is timed to give a 30 minute frequency with the 471.

515* Sunday service
A limited Sunday service is provided along much of Portsmouth Road between Esher and Kingston by Route 515*. However, between Seething Wells and Kingston 515* operates via Brighton Road, Surbiton Station and Penrhyn Road. For further details see leaflet.

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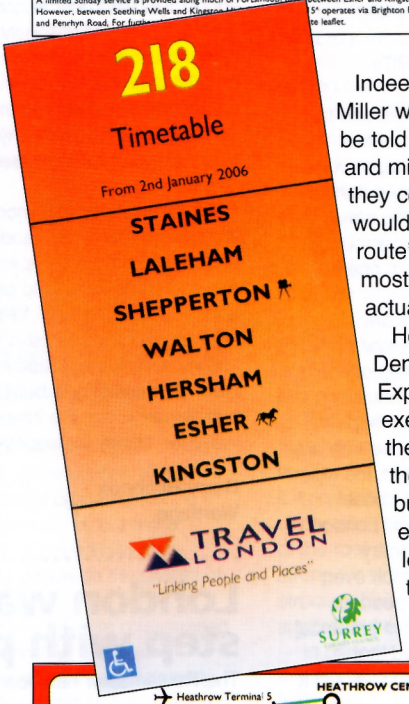
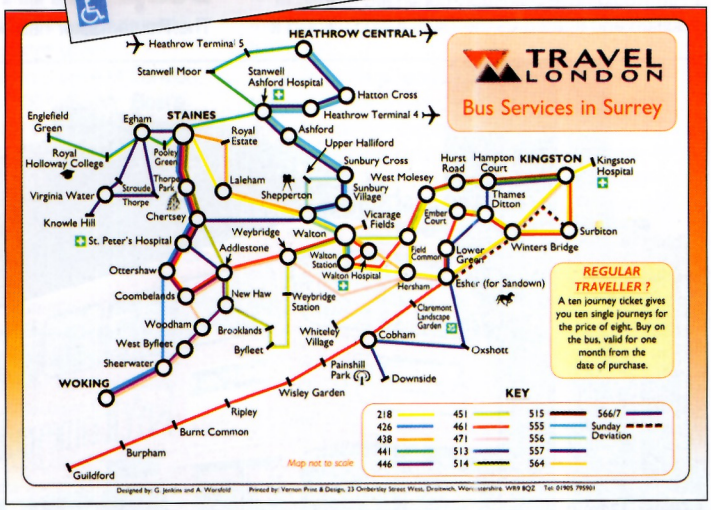
Telephone: 01932 340617

For timetable details of all bus services in Surrey.
www.surreycc.gov.uk/passenger_transport



Indeed I once called Tellings-Golden Miller when my bus hadn't turned up, to be told it had gone 'U/S at Hatton Cross and missed at least one rounder', and they couldn't tell me when the next one would come along because that route's 'not on the AVL'. Possibly the most worrying thing was that I actually understood all that.

Hopefully such nonsense will stop. Denis Wormwell, who was National Express Coaches' very able chief executive is now chief executive of the group's bus operations and at the top of his agenda is making bus services easy to understand, especially to non-users. This leaflet pre-dated his appointment to the post, and it has been drawn to his attention.



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UPCOMING EVENTS • JUNE 3-18 • TROLLEYSIX!

The latest incarnation of the biennial trolleybus running event under the museum's wired route should see the appearance of several trolleybuses not seen for several years, some of them not yet fully restored. At least one London six-wheeler is promised and some preserved European trolleybuses may be there in addition to the usual Schaffhausen 207. Normal museum admission charges.

We want to hear from readers, operators and transport authorities about how the industry is tackling the challenge of imparting accessible information to the travelling public — whether in timetables, leaflets or maps, at bus stops, bus stations or on the Internet. If you find items of interest (tell us about the good just as much as about the bad) and could write about 600 words on the subject, accompanied by photographs and/or publicity material, please contact the Editor at the Leven address shown on p2 or send an e-mail to **buseseditor@btconnect.com**

New for LRB in March 2007 is the removal of the Tramway & Light Transit section in the Suppliers chapter of the book. This reflects the changed emphasis from tramway to bus-based rapid transit. The tram entries have not been removed but are now incorporated in the existing Suppliers section.

Not all updated entries will be shown after April as most of the replies come in between April and August and it would not be practicable. The Little Red Book is published in September, in time for the coach and bus shows in the Autumn.

SECTION 2 - LICENSING AUTHORITIES

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT
Advisory Non-Departmental Bodies: (includes:)
Commission for Integrated Transport
Chmn: Peter Hendy
E-mail: cfit@dft.gsi.gov.uk
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee
E-mail: dptac@dft.gsi.gov.uk

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UK Supplier: Autoholdings
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Web site: www.bmcukltd.com
Models: integral front-engined schoolbus, integral front-engined midicoach, integral rear-engined 11m low-floor single-deck bus

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UK Supplier: Neoman Bus UK
Frankland Road, Blagrove, Swindon SN5 8YU
Web site: www.man.co.uk
UK Dealer: Mentor Coach & Bus Ltd
Carlton House, Euroway Industrial Estate, Hellaby, Rotherham S66 8QL
Tel: 01709 700600
Web site: www.mentorplc.com
Ireland supplier: BRIAN NOONE
Straffan Road, Maynooth, Co Kildare
Tel: 00 353 1 628 6311
Fax: 00 353 1 628 5404
Web site: www.briannooneltd.ie
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Tel: 0151 547 1425
Fax: 0151 546 6066
Website: www.trampower.co.uk/CityClass.html
Models: Articulated lightweight low-cost tram

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Models: StreetCar rapid transit vehicle (further models - see bodybuliders section).

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Web site: www.cumminsallison.co.uk

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Web site: www.goskills.org

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Fax: 0121 556 6299
Web site: www.centro.org.uk
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Chassis/Bodies: Ansaldo
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*TRAVEL WEST MIDLANDS
51 BORDESLEY GREEN, BIRMINGHAM B9 4BZ
Tel: 0121 254 7200
Fax: 0121 254 7277
Web site: www.travelwm.co.uk
Ch Exec: Denis Wormwell Fin Dir: Peter Coates Eng Dir: Jack Henry
Fleet: 1,687 - 978 double-deck bus, 31 articulated bus, 613 single-deck bus, 65 minibus.
Chassis: 21 DAF. 360 Dennis. 13 Leyland. 283 MCW. 288 Mercedes. 91 Optare. 620 Volvo. 11 Scania.
Bodies: 412 Alexander. 13 Leyland. 283 MCW. 288 Mercedes. 112 Optare. 102 Plaxton. 466 Wright. 11 Scania.
Ops incl: local bus services, school contracts, private hire.
Livery: Red/White/Blue
Ticket System: Wayfarer 3.
Associated companies: Travel Dundee, Travel London

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*TRAVEL LONDON LTD
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Fax: 020 7805 3510
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Man Dir: Paul McGowan Ops Dir: Bill Weatherley Eng Dir: Steve Hamilton
Fin Dir: Ross Hanley
Fleet: 433 - 198 double-deck bus, 223 single-deck bus, 12 midibus
Chassis: Dennis. Optare. Mercedes. Volvo.
Bodies: Alexander. Wright. East Lancs. Plaxton. Caetano.
Ops incl: local bus services
Livery: Red (London), Red and white (Surrey CC)
Ticket system: Wayfarer, Almex (Subsidiary of National Express Group)

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E-mail: info@traveldundee.co.uk
Web site: www.traveldundee.co.uk
Fleetname: Travel Dundee.
Chmn: J Henry Man Dir: J Lee, MBE
Fleet: 116 - 18 double-deck, 85 single-deck, 13 coach
Chassis: 7 Dennis. 2 Leyland. 7 Mercedes. 12 Optare. 6 Scania. 82 Volvo.
Bodies: 1 Aitken. 3 East Lancs. 2 Leyland. 1 Marshall. 12 Optare. 17 Plaxton. 1 Reeve Burgess. 79 Wright.
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Alexander Enviro 400
Scania Omnicity rigid bus, possibly Newport

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SWITCH

SANDTOFT TO CELEBRATE READING TROLLEYBUS ERA

Almost 70 years after Reading's first trolleybus ran (18 July 1936) the reign of the town's trolleybuses will be celebrated at the Trolleybus Museum at Sandtoft.

The spring bank holiday weekend (27-29 May) at Sandtoft will be given over to Reading's trolleybuses, when all five preserved examples, nos.113, 144, 174, 181 and 193, are scheduled to operate together. To complement the trolleybuses, up to five contemporary Reading Corporation motorbuses and the undertaking's ex-London Transport AEC tower wagon will also visit Sandtoft.

The celebration is being organised by the British Trolleybus Society, itself celebrating its 45th birthday this year, in partnership with the Trolleybus Museum at Sandtoft. Between 11.00 and 17.00 each day, the five trolleybuses will provide a minimum 10min service on the museum's circuit, and at times this will be stepped up so that all five operate together. The motorbuses, as well as running around the museum site, will be used on the free bus service on the Sunday and Monday from Doncaster to the museum, departing West Street (near the railway station) at 12.30, and on a short tour of the Isle of Axholme. There will be line-ups of the vehicles and photo-calls, plus a slide show presentation and a special exhibition, both featuring Reading's trolleybuses.

Sandtoft's Francis Whitehead says the event will be the first time since the Reading trolleybus closure on 3 November 1968 that 144, 174 and 181 have been together (and the first time ever that all five trolleybuses have run together, as 193 entered service in 1961 on the day after 113 was withdrawn). Apart from 113, which the BTS restored to working order in 1999, none of the trolleybuses has been under power for some time: 193 has recently returned to Sandtoft and has had its traction motor refurbished, while 174 is undergoing extensive restoration at Sandtoft in preparation for the event. No.144 — preserved in its civic last trolleybus livery — was left to Sandtoft by the late Mike Dare; it has been mothballed for 28 years but just as Mike had planned, it will be back in service for this weekend.

Bookings for a coach being run by Reading Buses Goldline on Sunday 28 May to Sandtoft are reported to be selling quickly, with many former employees wanting to see 'their trolleybuses' again. Further details can be viewed on Sandtoft's website www.sandtoft.org or during May, by calling the museum's 24hr information line 01724 711391.

Former Reading Corporation vehicles that will be at Sandtoft for spring bank holiday weekend

Trolleybuses			*Motorbuses*		
1132	1939	AEC 661T/ Park Royal	47	1935	AEC Regent/ Park Royal
144	1949	BUT 9611T/ Park Royal	98	1956	AEC Regent III/ Park Royal
174	1950	Sunbeam S7/ Park Royal	3	1957	AEC Regent III/ Park Royal
181	1950	Sunbeam S7/ Park Royal	52	1965	AEC Reliance/ East Lancs
193	1961	Sunbeam F4A/ Burlingham	76	1966	Dennis Loline/ East Lancs

Tower wagon 32 (TXV 909) 1958 AEC Mercury (ex-London Transport 1076Q)

Above: Park Royal-bodied BUT no.143, built in 1949, in Whitley Street, Reading in 1967 on a lunchtime short working duty to Community Centre. Similar 144 has been restored and is due back in service at Sandtoft. MIKE RUSSELL

Right: Lowbridge Park Royal-bodied AEC Regent III 3 (MRD 146) — seen at last year's Cobham open weekend — is among the motorbuses expected at the Sandtoft event.

RALLY CALENDAR UPDATE

APRIL

22/23 **Keighley** Bus Museum St George's Day Weekend.
Brighton. UK Coach Rally.

23 **Manchester** Museum of Transport London Bus Day.
Middlesbrough. Teesside Vintage Running Day.

29/30 (to 1 May)
Llandudno Transport Festival.
Sandtoft Trolleybus Museum. North East Trolley Weekend.
Rushden, Northants Cavalcade of Transport and Country Fair.
Rhyl-Llandudno Crosville Motor Services centenary road run.
Gateshead MetroCentre bus rally.

30 (and 1 May)
Eastbourne. Magnificent Motors.

MAY

1 **Carnforth, Lancs** Ribble Preservation Trust 'Brief Encounter' running day, Carnforth railway station, 10.00-16.00.

NOTE REVISED DATE

7 **London-Brighton** Historic Commercial Vehicle Run.
Ipswich/Felixstowe Historic Vehicle Run.

14 **West Bromwich.** Sandwell Historic Vehicle Show
Basingstoke Festival of Transport.
Stoke. Potteries Omnibus Preservation Society Rally & Running Day and Potteries Gathering at Wedgwood Visitor Centre, Barlaston.
Slough and Windsor Running Day.

The National Association of Road Transport Museums is again this year producing a leaflet listing the road passenger transport museums and collections made accessible to the public by NARTM member organisations. If you would like to receive a copy, write or send your postal address by e-mail to the Marketing Department, Ian Allan Publishing, 4 Watling Drive, Hinckley, LE10 3EY, e-mail: marketing@ianallanpublishing.co.uk

NARTM
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English and Welsh reports (no photographs) should be sent to: **John G. Lidstone, 15 Beach Court, Rampart Street, Shoeburyness, Essex, SS3 9AF,** marking your envelope **'Fleet News'**) E-mail text messages (no attachments or photographs, please) to: **fleetnews@lineone.net.**

IN FLEET NEWS THIS MONTH

- **Alfa deserts Dennis for Volvo coaches**
- **Fourth OmniDekka for Beeston's**
- **Northern Star operates Sentinel steamer**
- **Oxford borrows W&D Citaros**
- **Reading hires ex-London Spectras**

BODY TYPE

AB	Articulated single-deck bus
AC	Articulated coach
B	Rigid single-deck bus
C	Coach
DP	Dual purpose, usually coach seats in a bus shell
H	Double-decker
L	Lowbridge double-decker with side sunken gangway upstairs. All other double-deckers are H (highbridge) regardless of overall height.
M	Minibus
O	Permanent open-top
CO	Convertible open-top
PO	Partial open-top

SEATING CAPACITY

For double-deckers, this is shown with the upper deck capacity first (e.g. 43/30, indicating 43 'over' 30. Where the split is not known, a total figure (e.g. 73) is shown in the same style as for single-deckers. The total seating capacity shown includes all fixed and tip-up seats. The vehicles themselves may show other permutations of seats, standing spaces and wheelchair capacity.

DOOR POSITION

F	Front (can be directly behind front axle on vehicles with no front overhang)
R	Rear
RD	Rear with platform doors
C	Centre
D	Dual (two) doors
T	Triple doors

The letter 't' after the door position indicates the provision of a toilet, while 'L' after the door position shows that a wheelchair lift is fitted.

REGISTRATIONS

Registration numbers issued from 1 September 2001 show a two-letter area identification code (e.g. BU for Birmingham, CU for Swansea, SX for Inverness), followed by a two-digit code indicating the period of first registration (e.g. 51 for September 2001 to February 2002, 02 for March to August 2002, 52 for September 2002 to February 2003, 03 for March to August 2003 and so on. These are followed by a three-letter identification of the vehicle itself. In 'Fleet News', a batch of vehicles with consecutively issued registrations will be shown in the following fashion: LS34-46 (GG51 PYS/T/V-Z, PZB-F/H). The letters I and Q are not used in these three-letter combinations.

Where a vehicle has been re-registered, its previous registration number(s) (where known) follow in italic type (e.g. RM48 (LDS 199A, *VLT 48*), with the most recent given first.

REGISTRATION NOTES By DAVID STANIER

During the 55 half year to 28 February, the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency withheld even more area identification marks for sale as Select registrations. In addition to those listed in February 2005 Registration Notes, it is understood to have withheld BU, CA, CU, FA, GU, MA, ML, RE, RO, SL, VA, VO and WA marks.

Age related re-registration marks as far as **UXT** were allocated by the end of last year. These included **UXS**, which would have been a pre-1974 Paisley registration. In the days of six-character registrations, Paisley reached only JXS by 1964 when it began issuing AXS-B marks. The only UXS marks allocated to Scotland are 801-99 UXS for Aberdeen.

Luton has begun **Q-OBH** (to follow **Q-NVS**) and Northampton has introduced **Q-SBD** following **Q-RRP**.

New series in Northern Ireland are **BIG** (Enniskillen) and anticipated from Downpatrick will be **KJZ** and from Londonderry, **PUI**.

Abbey Coaches, Hull

Mercedes-Benz 711/Onyx C24F N847 YHH has been acquired from Hulley, Baslow.

Aintree Coachline, Bootle

MCW Metrobus BOK 3V has been scrapped after several years parked up at Eastham.

Alfa, Chorley

New coaches here show a change of direction from the Dennis R410s favoured for the past four years. They are Volvo B12B/Plaxton Paragon C53F PN06 KJV/X/Y and C49Ft PN06 KJZ, KKA. The rest of the fleet comprises 19 Dennis R410/Plaxton Paragons and 10 DAF SB3000/Ikarus.

Alpine, Llandudno

Dennis Javelin R6 ALP is now DP70F for schools work. Mercedes-Benz 709D L154 FRJ is also in schoolbus yellow.

Bedford YMT BEY 7W has been withdrawn. Also noted withdrawn at Llandudno recently were Bristol VRs WDM 352R, BPT 927S, Leyland Atlantean VTD 720T, Leyland Nationals GMB 392T, KMA 397T, Leyland Cub B176 WYV, Mercedes-Benz 709D F211 DCC and Iveco TurboDaily G142 JJC. Leyland Olympian/ECW WDC 219Y and Bristol VRT/SL3 RWA 860R have gone for scrap.

Ambassador, Great Yarmouth

New additions are Volvo B12B/Sunsundeguis FJ06 BPZ, BRF in UK Holidays livery.

Anglian, Beccles, Suffolk

New are Volvo B7RLE/Wright Eclipse Urban 401-4 (AU06 BOV, BPE/F/K). Go North East has acquired Scania L94UB/Wright Solars 205/6 (YR02 ZYM/K).

Arriva Cymru AA

Dennis Dart 2354 (V584 DJC) has received Tilling green with cream band and black lining out, complete with Crosville underlined fleetnames, in connection with the 100th anniversary of Crosville Motor Services. The front is in Arriva livery, however. It is allocated to Rhyl and is used regularly on the 12 to Llandudno.

Aquamarine and silver-liveried open-top Scania N113DRB 3995 (G35 HKY) has been route-branded for Snowdon Sherpa service S2, as the tender has been retained for a further three years. Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer 826 (V556 ECC) was vandalised in Machynlleth railway yard in February.

Now sold are Mercedes-Benz Vario/Plaxton Beavers 340/3/6/53 (R110/3/6/23 TKO), Dennis Dart/Wadham Stringer 1139 (J556 GTP) and Leyland Lynx 2 1755 (J655 UHN).

Arriva Derby AA

Expiry of the contract for park-&-ride contract service 102 has left Dennis Dart SLFs 2276/7 (SN53 ESG/O) on normal service in white contract livery.

Leyland Fleetline 4301 (GTO 301V) achieved 26 years' service in Derby at the end of January. The remaining 1984 Marshall-bodied Volvo Citybuses continue on all-day service.

Transfers between Derby and Swadlincote occur more frequently these days, with Optare Excel 2999 (P316 FAW) now here, Dart SLF/Alexander ALX200 2252 (X252 HBC) back here again, and Volvo B10BLE 3606 (V606 DBC) and Plaxton/Dart 2221 (T51 JJF) moving to Swadlincote.

Arriva London AA

More re-registrations, using former AEC Routemaster registrations, are Volvo B7TL/Wright VLW88, 92/5/7 (LF52 UPY/E/J/L), to WLT 888/92/5/7. The Routemasters from which they came, RML888/92/5/7, were re-registered 255/3/2/4 UXO before sale.

Routemaster RML2636 (NML 636E) is being used to transport customers to and from the Little Mill Inn at Rowarth, near Hayfield, Derbyshire.

DAF DB250/Plaxton President DLP1 (V601 LGC) has joined DLP2-11 at **The Original London Sightseeing Tour**. DAF DB250/Alexander ALX400 DLA65-71 (S265-71 JUA) are expected to go to Arriva North West. Further Leyland Olympians sold to Ensign, Purfleet (dealer) are L539/41 (G539/41 VBB).

Arriva Midlands AA

Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties H45/30F 4503/4 (F256/8 YTJ) have been transferred from Arriva North West; 4503 is allocated to Wigston. Also here is former Arriva the Shires & Essex Leyland Olympian/ECW 4572 (D242 FYM), reported at Thurmaston.

Arriva North East AA

Volvo B7RLE/Wright Eclipse Urban demonstrator BV55 UAZ has been on loan at Durham.

Further Leyland Olympians are ex-Arriva London ECW-bodied 7211-3 (C102 CHM, D198, 223 FYM), ex-The Shires & Essex D231 FYM and ex-Arriva London Alexander-bodied VLT 173, WLT 554 (*J553/4 BSH*). Arriva North West has provided Volvo B6/Plaxton Pointer B38F 4351-8 (L201/10/6/9/20/32/5/44 TKA) for Bishop Auckland for the ex-Go North East work. The only vehicles taken over from Go North East are Durham County Council-owned Optare Solo YN52 TOU and Optare Alero YN03 UXW. Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer B35F J220/1 HGY, J468 OKP and Dart/Northern Counties B35F L141 YVK are also here from Arriva Yorkshire, as yet un-numbered.

Recently acquired ex-First Stop. Renfrew Dennis/Plaxton Mini Pointer Darts have been prepared for service, 1793 (W166 RNP) at Darlington, 1794/7 (W631 RNP, Y215 BGB) by Arriva North West at Bootle, 1796 (Y259 KNB) at Ashington and 1798/9 (SA52 MYT, SF04 RHA) at Blyth. Fleetnumbers 1776-89 have been allocated to Arriva Scotland West, hence the MPDs taking 1793-9.

Reserve Optare MetroRider 910 (R910 JNL) has been at work at Jesmond and 872 (M872 LBB) was back in use at Richmond. Mercedes-Benz O405/Optare Prisma 3006 (N806 XHN) has been out of service with accident damage, Dart SLF 1624 being pressed into service at Redcar to replace it.

Left: One of the relatively rare Plaxton Pointer-bodied Volvo B6s that Arriva has transferred from its North West to its North East business to operate services taken over from Go North East at Bishop Auckland is 4532 (L210 TKA), seen in Sedgefield. NEIL WISE

Above: Bluebird, Middleton 61 (SN04 EGF), the Greater Manchester independent's recently acquired ex-demonstrator TransBus Enviro300, which operated previously as Go North East 4977. HOWARD WILDE

DAF SB3000WS/Plaxton 2124 (V214 DJR) is in Arriva Express livery, while MCW Metrobus 614 (GYE 515W) has been painted yellow for school work.

Leyland Lynx 2 driver trainer 9993 (H755 WWW) has been in use with Arriva Scotland West. Withdrawn to reserve are Mercedes-Benz Vario 2658 (S822 MCC) and Optare MetroRider 2726 (M440 HPF), but Leyland Olympian/ECW 7268 (C268 XEF) has been withdrawn for disposal.

Arriva North West AA

New are VDL SB120/Wright Cadets 2570-3 (CX06 BGU/V/Y/Z) for Chester services X44/X55 (Chester-Mold), followed by VDL SB200/Wright Commander 2574 (CX06 BHA), the first of a new batch for Winsford, Rhyl and Llandudno Junction.

Volvo B7TL/Alexander Dennis ALX400s 4115-29 entered service registered CX06 EAK/M/O/P/W/Y, EBA/C/D/F/G/J-M; they were originally registered CX55 EBK-P/U/V/Z, ECA/C-F/J. Further low-floor double-deckers expected are former London DAF DB250/Alexander ALX400 S265-71 JUA.

Despite the sale of a large number of ex-Blue Bus MetroRiders, reported last month, another, 86 (L686 SUM) has been repainted into Arriva livery. The closure of Crewe depot on 25 February saw its allocation pass to Winsford, although Leyland Lynx 1755 (J655 UHN) and Leyland Olympians 3022/39/64 (A152 UDM, A139 MRN, B964 WRN) have been withdrawn. Lynx 1750 (H130 LPU) has been renumbered 8163 for its new role as a driver trainer, 1751 (H34 PAJ) becoming 8184. Leyland National 2 8166 (DOC 26V) has now been withdrawn, leaving the only serviceable National as 8190 (BCW 824V) at Bolton. Leyland Olympian/ECW 3039 (A139 MRN) and Alexander-bodied 3251 (F251 YTJ) are withdrawn but still on fleet strength. Volvo B6/Plaxton 7201/10/6/9/20/32/5/44 (L201 TKA etc) have gone to Arriva North East, Olympians 3256/8 (F256/8 YTJ) to Arriva Midlands.

Arriva Southern Counties AA

The first of the 14 Volvo B7RLE/Wright Eclipse Urbans for Fastrack service B is 3801 (GN06 EVG). Alan Watkins advises us that Fastrack is not a Kent County Council service; the vehicles were bought by KCC using money from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of Kent Thameside Partnership, the regeneration delivery board serving Dartford and Gravesham. And they will operate route B not route A, from The Bridge (a new mixed-use development by ProLogis on the site of the former hospital) to Bluewater and Gravesend via a planned bus-only flyover above the Dartford tolls.

Driver trainer Dennis Darts T148, T463/9, T505 (L148 YVK, J463 MKL, J469 SKO, L505 CPJ) have been withdrawn. Mercedes-Benz 814D T154 (J154 NKN) has gone to Erith Commercials (dealer) and T463 to Ensign, Purfleet (dealer). Dart T310 (J310 WHJ) is with A1 Minibuses, Nottingham

Mercedes-Benz Vario 1180 (R950 VPU) was transferred to Arriva Midlands, but is back again. Dart 3004 (L506 CPJ) is at Arriva Southend where it ousted an ex-London Leyland Olympian/ECW. Darts 3101/12 (J220/1 HGY) are with Arriva Yorkshire and 3168 (J468 OKP) with Arriva North East.

Arriva The Shires & Essex AA

Eighteen VDL SB120/Wright Cadets are expected in August for London services. Leyland Olympian 5843 (D242 FYM) has gone to Arriva Midlands at Leicester. Volvo B10M/Plaxton Expressliner 4035 (H199 AOD) is also withdrawn. It is reported that a buyer is being sought for the Garston-based coaching unit.

Arriva Yorkshire AA

Arriva North West Dennis Dart/East Lancs 1167-9 (M167-9 WKA) returned there in January. Dart/Northern Counties 135/47-9 (L127/57/31/30 YVK) have gone to Arriva Midlands, 141 (L141 YVK) plus Plaxton-bodied 153/4/9 (J220/1 HGY, J468 OKP) to Arriva North East and Dart/Alexander 165 (W185 HBT) is withdrawn, all as a result of service cuts at Castleford. Also withdrawn are Leyland Lynxes 381/2 (J381/2 BWU), Optare MetroRider 746 (M746 WWR), Leyland Olympian/ECW 574 (A574 NWX) after rear axle failure, 586 (A586 NWX) after accident damage and unscathed 607 (B607 UUM). Lynx 381 is a mobile canteen at Castleford bus station.

The remaining Optare MetroRiders will be withdrawn imminently.

ASD Coaches, Strood, Kent

Former Go North East Leyland National 2 FTN 708W has been sold.

Axe Valley, Seaton, Devon

Former Arriva North West Leyland Olympian/ECW B194 BLG is in service in Arriva colours.

B-Line, Kinsley, S Yorks

Optare MetroRider MR03/B29F J708 CGK is here from Blackburn Transport.

Baker, Biddulph

Mercedes-Benz O815D/Sitcar Beluga SL02 OLB is in use.

Beaumont, Gloucester

Former Stagecoach Leyland Olympian/Alexander C637 LFT was recently sold on eBay. Dukes Travel's Dennis Dart LUI 1512 and Mercedes-Benz 709D M349 OBC have been on short-term loan.

Beeston, Hadleigh, Suffolk

Another former demonstrator Scania OmniDekka N94UD/East Lancs H47/33F is YN54 OBJ. Four OmniDekkas are now here, the two ex-demonstrators (the other, reported last month, is YN54 OBX) and YN03 DDA, OBB bought new. Also owned are Scania N113DRB/East Lancs Cityzen H47/31F S333 HEB, V335 EAK ex-Fowler, Holbeach Drove and Kettlewell, Retford respectively.

Birmingham Coach Company GA

More vehicles transferred here within Go-Ahead are Volvo B10M/Plaxton Excalibur C53F R9, 10/2 OXF from Oxford Bus Company for National Express work.

Blackburn Transport

Ex-London Central Volvo Olympians 17/8 (N424/5 JBV) are both in the OC (Outer Circle) purple, orange and yellow livery and are to be named *Queen Elizabeth II* and *Queen Mary II* to commemorate 125 years of public transport in the Borough; Darwen's last two English Electric streamlined bogie trams were 23 *Queen Elizabeth* and 24 *Queen Mary*.

Bluebird, Middleton

Former TransBus Enviro300 demonstrator SN04 EGF has been acquired and numbered 61. Two new Alexander Dennis Mini Pointer Darts include 19 (SS55 BLU).

Brentwood Coaches, Little Waltham, Essex

Acquisitions from Epsom Coaches are Volvo B10M/Jonckheere C53F 8, 10 (LUI 7650, WXC 732 *P807/6 DPA*).

Brighton & Hove GA

Refurbished convertible open-top Dennis Trident/East Lancs Lolyne 820 (T820 RFG) now has red seating on both decks in place of grey and has regained its name *Dame Flora Robson*. The two 12m Scania OmniDekkas on order are expected to be numbered 400/1.

Bullock, Cheadle, Greater Manchester

New is Scania OmniDekka N94UD/East Lancs MX06 LDN, delivered in plain white and given Oxford Road Link branding.

Cardiff Bus

Introduction of the Scania OmniCity bendibuses has been delayed until May. Travel West Midlands-liveried Scania OmniCity CN94UD/H45/27F 4697 (YN55 PXB) was loan for a few days.

Cavalier, Sutton Bridge

The ex-Arriva East Herts & Essex ECW-bodied Leyland Olympians are numbered 4228/30/1 (C38 CHM, D181, 215 FYM).

Cavendish, Bexhill

The opening fleet (see News this month) comprises ex-Metroline Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer B36F 225-7 (R175 VLA, R112/7 RLY) and ex-Arriva London South AEC Routemaster/Park Royal H40/32R RML2324 (CUV 324C), which has already been reported with part owner Renown Coaches.

Cedric, Wivenhoe, Essex

All-Leyland Olympian/H47/31F K814-6 HMV have been acquired from Metrobus. Withdrawn is ECW coach-bodied Olympian 23 (B162 AKH, *B110 LPH*), the body of which is being dismantled, seats donated to 816.

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort Delgro

EB Ensignbus

EY EYMS Group

FG FirstGroup

GA Go-Ahead Group

NX National Express Group

ST Stagecoach Group

TD Transdev

TGM Tellings - Golden Miller

VE Veolia

WG Wellglade Group

Chalkwell, Sittingbourne
Ex-Ulsterbus Dennis Dart/Wright Handybus DP39F CAZ 6602-4 have been acquired from Wealden PSV, Five Oak Green (dealer) for services 326/327 (Sittingbourne-Medway Hospital).

Chambers, Bures, Suffolk
Another ex-Metroline Volvo Olympian/Alexander RH H43/25D acquired via Ensign (dealer), Purfleet, is P488 MBY.

Choice, Willenhall
Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer 104 (T429 EBD) is in yellow with green skirt. Both this and T428 EBD are rented from Dawsonrentals. Mini Pointer Dart X702 UKS is numbered 108.

Claribel, Birmingham
This operator has ordered the first Plaxton Centro-bodied VDL SB200, which will join the Wright Commander-bodied SB200s already operated.

Coachman, Swindon
Ex-Reading Leyland Titan RMO 70Y is in fleet livery.

Collins, Milton, Cambridge
Former Eastbourne Dennis Javelin/Duple B55F G114 FKJ is here.

Common Ground, Saffron Walden
Former Eastern National Bristol VRT/SL2 PWC 512M has been dispensed with to WFL Commercials, Lolworth, Cambs and was expected to go to another charity in the Grantham area for spares.

Compass Bus, Worthing
Former London short, step-entrance Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer J599 DUV is in blue and white overall Tesco livery for a free service to Chichester Tesco.

Courtney, Bracknell
Another new Optare Solo is YJ55 BLV. Mercedes-Benz Vario O614D T2 CCL has been re-registered T141 LAF and sold. Also sold are Dennis Javelin K155 EJB, DAF X906 RHG, Scania R672 NFR, Optare Solo X939 NUB, Renaults RO03 JVD/L and DAF DB250s R382 GTW, T137 AUA.

Silver-liveried Optare Solo YE52 KPP starred in BBC2's *Working Lunch* recently, as it is fuelled by vegetable oil. Conversion cost should be offset within eight months, and, if successful, all 45 vehicles could be converted.

Frank Guy-bodied Renault Masters RO03 JVD/L passed to TransLinc, Lincoln.

Crusader, Clacton
New is Setra EU06 JBX.

D&G, Adderley Green, Staffs
Mercedes-Benz 811D/Wright 39 (G737 NNS) has come from Choice Travel, while Mercedes 709D/Marshall B30F 23, 47 (N941/2 MGG), 811D/Marshall 77 (N808 PDS) and 811D/Wright 78 (L37 OKV) have been acquired from McGill, Greenock. The last 811D/Carlyle, 44 (VIL 8695), has been withdrawn.

Dereham Coachways, Norfolk
Volvo B12B-62/Van Hool Alizée T9 C49Ft YJ55 EZE is new, but Dennis Javelin/UVG N108 WVF and Setra Millennium W2 SET have been sold.

Above: CAZ 6603 is one of three ex-Ulsterbus Dennis Darts with Wright Handybus bodywork that Chalkwell has bought to operate Kent County Council tendered services 326 and 327 taken over from Arriva Southern Counties. RICHARD GODFREY

Doyle, Ripley, Derbyshire
Former Arriva Midlands Mercedes-Benz 811D/Marshall B33F M455/60 EDH are reported here.

Dunn-Line, Nottingham VE
Further new Volvo B12B/Plaxton Panther Expressliner C49Ft are 5512/3 (FJ55 XBA/B) and similar 34 (FA04 LJK) has also been recorded. This operator was sold to Veolia (*née* Connex) in March.

Courtesy of the PSV Circle, the coaches taken over with the **Alpha, Hull** business in February were Dennis Javelin/Plaxton C68F CIB 2652 (*F244 SAB*), Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton C49Ft FNZ 1048 (*P48 TRH*), Scania K113CRB/Van Hool C49Ft FNZ 1052 (*N136 YMS*), Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton C49Ft HJZ 4034/5 (*M634/5 KAG*), Bova Futura FHD12-340/C30Ft LCZ 5692 (*N50 MDC*), Volvo B7R/Plaxton MKZ 1562 (*S262 WAT*), Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton C46F MKZ 1849 (*N49 MDW*), B10M-62/Plaxton C53F NLZ 1692 (*S246 WAT*), B10M-62/Plaxton C50Ft NLZ 1718 (*P118 UAT*), B10M-62/Plaxton C53Ft NUI 6043 (*N743 GKH*), B10M-62/Plaxton C53F YCZ 2347/8 (*S247/8 WAT*) and YIL 4412 (*N744 GKH*), Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton C29F W204/7 YAP, Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 413CDi/Optare C16F Y788 OFE, Ayats A3E/BR1/C57/18Dt Y2 WGT, Mercedes-Benz Touro/Caetano C33Ft YX53 AEN and similar, but C49Ft BX04 CSF, MZT, YX04 GSZ, HKK, JFZ.

Buses taken over in the same deal were MCW Metrobus/Alexander H45/33F CKS 390X and ULS 615X, Volvo B10M-50/East Lancs H47/38D E320/1/3 BVO, Dennis Dart SLF/Caetano B33F S512 XCR, Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer B39F W813/7 UAG and similar B41F-seated Super Pointer Darts YX03 MWG/J/K, plus Ford Transit 16-seater X91 KNT.

East Yorkshire EY
Volvo Olympians 600/1/37 (A10 EYD, N601 BRH, R782 SOY) returned from Finglands on 3 March. National Express Volvo B10M/Plaxton 46 (YX02 JFY) has been re-registered A19 EYC. B10M/Berkhof 49 (A18 EYC) is white for Grand UK Holidays.

Ebley Coaches, Ebley, Glos
Leyland Tiger/Alexander P-type 704 BYL (*D615 ASG*) is in use on schools work. K693 UFV is a Mercedes-Benz 709D/Plaxton Beaver acquired from Streamline, Bath.

Edwards, Llantwit Fardre
New is Scania/Irizar C70FL S-Kool YN06 CHH.

Emblings, Guyhirn
Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton Premiere 320 C57F YIL 1231 (*N32 AAJ*) is in stock. The associated **Judd, Manea** fleet has ex-Morley, Whittlesey Bristol VRT/SL3/ECW WTU 485W, Bedford YNT/Duple UAV 457X and Volvo B10M/Plaxton VAZ 4863.

Express Motors, Penygroes
New are Optare Solo SlimLine M920SL/B31F EM06 ORS and CX06 AAU in yellow/silver livery. Optare Tempo demonstrator YJ55 BLX was here during March.

Finglands, Rusholme EY
Volvo Olympians 600/1/37 (A10 EYD, N601 BRH, R782 SOY) returned to East Yorkshire on 3 March.

First Berkshire FG
New Dennis Super Dart/East Lancs 43911-8 for Tillingbourne School contract services at Chilworth are based at a Surrey County Council outstation at Merrow, near Guilford, but maintained at Bracknell. They operate normal services during the day.

First CentreWest Dennis Dart/Marshall B22D DM41267 (T267 JLD) and B24F DM41792 (LN51 GJY) have been on loan at Slough to cover while front axle modifications were made to Alexander-bodied Darts. 41267 went on to Bracknell before returning to London.

The last yellow Plaxton-bodied Darts at Slough, DP46924/8 (N824/8 FLW), have been withdrawn. Scania L113CRL/Northern Counties 64813 (M813 PGM) went to PVS, Carlton (dealer) for scrap.

First Bristol FG
Twenty new Alexander Dennis Pointer Darts are due here in May, 14 at Lawrence Hill for services 8/9 (Temple Meads-Centre-Clifton circulars) and 8A/9A (Durdham Downs-Clifton-Centre-Temple Meads). The remaining six will go to Muller Road for service 73 (Cribbs Causeway-City Centre-Temple Quay). Their arrival will result in 11 Marshall-bodied Darts and nine Wright-bodied Volvo B6BLEs being cascaded. At the same time, there will be an exchange of B6BLEs and older Dart SLFs between Muller Road and Hengrove, leaving remaining B6BLEs at Hengrove.

Darts 46625/7/59 (M525/7 FFB, N559 LHU) have been repainted, as have Leyland Olympians 34562/3/8 (A962 THW etc) thus removing the last yellow, red and blue buses from normal service. Only driver trainer Lynx 62619 (F619 RTC) remains in yellow, red and blue. Bristol Tramways-liveried 34552 (A952 SAE) has returned to service following major refurbishment including a replacement floor and engine and carries a 'Visit Bristol' advertisement on the back. Unfortunately, the NBC green Olympian, 34549 (A949 SAE), has a defective engine and is to be scrapped along with 34544 (LWS 44Y), the oldest bus in the fleet. Lawrence Hill has lost its remaining Olympians, 34546/54/6-8 (A946/54 SAE, A956-8 THW); all remaining Leyland Olympians are at Muller Road and comprise 30537 (PSU 630), 34552/5/62-4/7/8 (A952 SAE, A955/62-4/7/8 THW). 34559 (A959 THW) has been delicensed.

Leyland Lynx 62617 (F617 RTC) is in use at Muller Road as a paint float vehicle while the K-registered Olympians undergo attention. 62652 (H652 YHT) has been at Hengrove for preparation as a driver trainer. Lynx

Below: First Bristol has introduced this new livery, in corporate colours, for Rail Link services 8 and 9, which connect Temple Meads Station, the city centre and Clifton. One of the first recipients is Marshall Capital-bodied Dennis Dart SLF 41191 (R191 VLA), new to CentreWest. BARRIE GILBERT

62622 (F622 RTC) has regained its original identity of 1622 with the Bristol Road Transport Collection for preservation as is ex-trainer Leyland Tiger 8150 (AAX 466A) rejoining similar 8149 (AAX 515A) To the same source has departed former taxi bus, Mercedes-Benz 811D/Optare StarRider 3823 (E823 MOU).

Mercedes Varios 52553/64 (S553/64 RWP) have arrived from First Coaches and are on route 4.

Thanks to Gary Williams for welcome notes on Bristol this month.

First Coaches FG

Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton Beaver 52552/66 (S552/66 RWP) are here from First Wyvern, while 52553/64 (S553/64 RWP) are with First Bristol.

First Cymru FG

Transferred from First Bristol is Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer B29F 42717 (R717 BAE).

Volvo B10M-62 20145 (S315 SRL) has gone to First Devon & Cornwall, Volvo B6BLE 40563 (T312 VYG) to First Glasgow, while Dart/Wright Handybus 45316 (JDZ 2316) has been withdrawn. Mercedes-Benz 814Ds 50538/69 (F338 FCY, G369 MEP) have passed to James Coach Painters, Port Talbot (dealer).

First Devon & Cornwall FG

Two more Leyland Olympian/Alexander RL-type H47/31F from First Glasgow, 31390/1 (L178/9 UNS), arrived in February, followed in March by ex-Glasgow Volvo Citybus B10M-50/Alexander RV-type H47/37F 31312-5/7/8 (G685/6/92/3/5/6 PNS). More Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1RV/Alexander RH-type H47/26D from First Aberdeen are 31537/9 (A108 FSA, B112 MSO), were moved here last July and November. Transferred from First Essex in February was another Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1RH/ECW CH42/30F, 34812 (C412 HJN).

Transferred in from First Cymru is Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton C57F 20145 (S315 SRL).

The PSV Circle reports that Dennis Dart/Wright Handybus 46084 (K804 WTT) has been withdrawn following an accident. Bristol VRTs sold are 38573 (NTC 573R), 38785 (KOO 785V) and 38872 (LFJ 872W), 38785 going to Hardwick (dealer), Carlton for scrap. Also sold are Dennis Dart/Wright Handybus 45466 (NDZ 3166), Mercedes-Benz 709D/Plaxton Beaver 51145 (L645 VCV) and Leyland Lynxes 62605/6 (F605/6 RTC).

First Eastern Counties FG

All 10 of First's former New World First Bus, Hong Kong tri-axle Leyland Olympian/Alexander H53/31F were transferred from First Glasgow in March. They are 30097-106 (K481-9/80 EUX, *FW 3858, 2286, 3152, FV 6607, FW 2045,2508,1878,736,2788, FV 7737*). Ex-Glasgow AEC/Park Royal Routemasters 39480 (JJD 480D), 39717 (SMK 717F) are being repainted in traditional red and cream Eastern Counties livery with former London fleetnumbers RML2480, 2717. Leyland Lynx 62745 (G145 HNP) is another for use as a driver trainer.

Leyland Olympian/Alexander 34921 (G121 YEV) has been refurbished, 34926 (G126 YEV) has been reinstated but Olympian 34955 (G55 XLO) has been withdrawn. Leyland Olympian/ECW 34536/7 (XHK 236/7X) are reported withdrawn, leaving 34535 (XHK 235X), 34698 (B698 BPU), 34711 (A711 DAU) as the last ECW-bodied buses in the fleet.

Mercedes-Benz 709D/Plaxton 50941, (K641 GVX) and 711D/Alexander 51628 (N628 GAH) have been removed from stock.

Volvo B10M/Plaxton Premiere 20119 (N619 APU) is back from accident repairs.

Ellingham, Cromer and Fakenham outstations closed at the beginning of April.

First Essex FG

Leyland Olympian/ECW 34812 (C412 HJN) has followed 34809 to First Devon & Cornwall. 34819 (C419 HJN) returned to Chelmsford, but only to donate its rear axle to 34807 before collection by PVS, Carlton (dealer) for scrap. Leyland Lynx 62511 (F411 MNO) went to Hardwick for scrap but 62524 (F424 MJN) continues as a driver trainer.

Dennis Dart/Plaxton 46811 (L811 OPU) is back in service after fire damage. Mercedes-Benz 709D/Plaxton 51468 (M668 VJN) has gone to Northern Cyprus, registered HG 399.

First Hampshire & Dorset FG

Iveco minibuses are being replaced by Mercedes-Benz Varios from First West Yorkshire. Transferred so far are O814/Plaxton Beaver 2 B27F 50299, 50300/3 (R405 WWR, S406/9 GUB), at Hilsea. Vario 52605 (R505 NPR) is also at Hilsea from Weymouth.

Ex-Bere Regis & District Volvo B10M/Ikarus Blue Danube 20075 (TJI 3135, *E221 GCG*) is to be scrapped at Portswood, as are Mercedes 811D 51309 (M509 VYA) and 709D 51461 (M661 VJN). 709Ds 51220/47/62/78 (M220 PMS, M847/62 ATC, M278 UYD) have been removed by Erith Commercials. Iveco 52087 (M187 XTR) is delicensed.

First Leicester FG

Dennis Dart SLF/Caetano 42353 (Y353 AUY) is in use as a driver trainer.

Following changes to speed humps, low-floor single-deckers are now allowed along Melbourne Road again on service 17. The trees were then pruned, allowing double-deckers.

Dennis Dominators 30450/1 (B84/5 MRY) have been acquired by preservationist Richard Fletcher, who intends to keep one and cannibalise the other. They were ordered by South Yorkshire PTE, but delivered here in November 1984, although recently they were with First South Yorkshire.

Volvo B6 48074 (L674 RMD) has gone for scrap. Semi-automatic Leyland Titan PD3 30 (LJF30F) has gone to the Sheffield Bus Museum where restoration has begun.

First London FG

Dennis Tridents TN32967/70/4/5/8/9, 32806, 32958/9/80/1/3 have returned from Metroline and are in store. TN32805 (T805 LLC) has gone to First Glasgow.

First Manchester FG

Volvo B6/Alexander Dash 40192 (N343 CJA), 40236-8/40 (N789 EUB, N391 EUG, N325 HUA, N208 WBA) are back in service from reserve, while Volvo B10L/Wright Liberator 61522 (P763 XHS) returned to First Glasgow in March.

First Northampton FG

Ten Dennis Lance/Plaxton Verde are being transferred from First Wyvern. The first reported are 67113/7 (L823/7 HCY), 67210 (L210 AAB).

First Potteries FG

Ex-First Manchester Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer 40367/73/5-9/83 (R241/7/9-53/7 SBA) are in service at Adderley Green and similar 42726/7 (T726/7 REU) from First Somerset & Avon.

Scania L113CRL/Wright Axcess-ultralow 61159 (R173 GSX) has been severely damaged by a tree. Leyland Tiger driver trainer 60001 (G72 RND) is out of service at Newcastle-under-Lyme, where just four double-deckers remain.

continued overleaf...

Left: First Eastern Counties has repainted two of its recently acquired ex-First Glasgow AEC Routemasters in Tilling-style red/cream livery with gold Eastern Counties fleetnames. 39480 (JJD 480D), photographed outside the former Great Yarmouth Transport depot, once again carries its London fleetnumber, RML2480. GRAHAME BESSEY

Top left: Also transferred to First Eastern Counties are the 10 ex-China Motor Bus Leyland Olympian tri-axles with 84-seat Alexander RH-type bodies. Imported originally to operate in Greater Manchester, they have since been in Glasgow and were repainted into standard 'Barbie' livery in Leeds — where 30103 (K487 EUX) was photographed — before going on to the latest phase of their British lives. DANIEL STAZICKER

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort Delgro

EB Ensignbus

EY EYMS Group

FG FirstGroup

GA Go-Ahead Group

NX National Express Group

ST Stagecoach Group

TD Transdev

TGM Tellings - Golden Miller

VE Veolia

WG Wellglade Group

Leyland Lynx 60084 (D875 ELL) has been reallocated as a driver trainer at long last. Dart/Plaxton 40069 (J902 SEH) and Optare MetroRider 50021 (L231 NRE) have gone to PVS, Carlton (dealer) for scrap, Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties 30093 (D271 JVR) to a Chester Morris dance troupe.

First Somerset & Avon FG

A batch of former Yorkshire Coastliner Alexander Royale DPH43/29F-bodied Volvo Olympians has been acquired to replace the last Dennis Arrows at Bath, 31925/32/9/48. The Volvos are from the last batch of home-market Olympians, W432/3/4/6/7 CWX; W437 CWX was officially the last Olympian of all.

Dennis Lance SLF/Wright Pathfinders 67337/8/40-2 (M137 FAE etc) are back in service at Bath. The former Eastern Counties Dennis Javelin/Plaxton Derwents, 67511/2/20 (H611/2/20 RAH), have been sold. Optare Solo 53038 (Y38 HBT) is back in service after accident damage repairs.

Volvo B7LA/Wright Eclipse Fusion AB55D 10105 (V605 GGB) returned to First Glasgow in February.

First South Yorkshire FG

Ex-First Glasgow Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer 40843/4 (R758/9 DYS) are in service at Rotherham, while Leyland Lynx 62729 (G129 HNP) is here as a driver trainer.

Dennis Dominators 30450/1/88 and 30502 (B84/5 MRY, C878 JWE, D474 OWE) are out of use (30450/1 have been sold for preservation). Also out of use are Mercedes-Benz Varios 50191/8/9, 50204 (R124/31/2/7 XDT) and 709Ds 50204/8/9 (N277/8 JUG). In reserve are Dominators 30444/95 (A317 XAK, C886 JWE) and driver trainer 90101 (KKU 115W), plus Varios 50193-5, 50200 (R126-8/33 XDT).

Dominator driver trainers 30476 (A438 YAK) and 90101 (KKU 115W) have passed to the South Yorkshire Transport Group, as did Dominator 30503 (D475 OWE), for spares and then went to PVS, Carlton (dealer). Mercedes 50229 (J605 HMF) and the remains of Volvo B10M 644 (H644 RKU) also passed to PVS.

First West Yorkshire FG

Fifteen Volvo BLA/Wright Streetcars are due for Leeds service 4 (Whitmoor-Pudsey) in October.

Of the new Optare Solo M920/B32F, only 53901-4 (YK55 ENT/O/P/R) are used on the free Leeds city centre service. Solo M850/B29F YK55 ENJ was on loan from Optare in Metro red pending delivery of 53905/6 (YK55 ENM/N) but was used only occasionally as a spare vehicle. 53901-6 carry large numbers 1-6 on their roofs to monitor their progress by city centre cameras.

Further BMC 220 Condor schoolbuses are 68622/3 (YK55 AVG/J). A considerable number of this batch, 68601-50, has been delivered unregistered to Halifax and Bradford for storage.

The last vehicle in pre-FirstGroup livery, Calderline Olympian/Roe 30625 (A118 KUM), was repainted in February. The Leeds City Council-owned Mercedes-Benz minibuses loaned to the Bramley-based Access fleet are confirmed as 614D/O&H B13FL 0279 (W479 EUB) 0438/51 (YK03 JUH, YJ53 BYV) and Sprinter 413CDi/UVM B16FL KE03 JXU.

Mercedes Varios 50299, 50300/3 (R405 WWR, S406/9 GUB) have gone to First Hampshire & Dorset. Roe-bodied Leyland Olympians 30600/6 (CUB 35, 55Y) have been withdrawn, while 30608-11 (A83/5/6/8 KUM) have been despatched to PVS, Carlton (dealer), for scrap.

First Wyvern FG

Dennis Lances 67113/7 (L823/7 HCY) and 67210 (L210 AAB) have passed to First Northampton, Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton Beaver 52552/66 (S552/66 RWP) to First Coaches.

First York FG

Coincidentally the first Volvo BLA/Wright Streetcars, due to start here on 8 May, are, like Leeds's, for route 4, in this case Acomb-York University. Volvo B6BLE 40599 (YG02 DHX) has been away for fire damage repairs.

Fowler, Holbeach Drove, Lincs

Another acquisition is Volvo B7R/Plaxton Profile C57F PY52 PHN from Irving, Carlisle.

Galloway, Mendlesham

New, long Van Hool Astron T916s are 237-40 (AY06 BZN, CRF, CPX/Z)

Above: Go North East has repainted 3952 (H550 PVW), one of its ex-Dublin Bus Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympians, into fleet colours. These buses entered service in the livery of Isle of Man Transport, their immediate past owner. GARY MITCHELHILL

Geldard, Leeds

Another ex-Metroline Volvo Olympian/Alexander RH H43/25D acquired via Ensign (dealer), Purfleet, is P478 MBY. Leyland Olympian/Alexander H47/32F G760 VRT and G365 YUR are confirmed numbered 329/30 respectively and Volvo Olympian/Alexander Royale DPH45/29F L8, 9 YCL are 331/2. 329 has been upseated from H47/30F and 331/2 from DPH45/27F. VDL DB250/East Lancs YJ04 BKG is numbered 323, and MCW Metrobuses G110 FJW, F809/14/25 YLV are 324/5/6/8.

Ex-Chesterfield Leyland National VWA 34Y and DAF SB3000WS/Plaxton T183 AUA have been sold. Metrobus A618 BCN was used only for spares. Leyland National TAE 642S is in reserve and may be available for preservation.

Go Goodwin, Eccles

Latest acquisitions are ex-Nottingham City Transport Volvo B10B-58/Alexander B51F M601/2 TTV. Scania K93CRB/Plaxton Derwent F170 DET has been sold to K&J, Rufforth.

Go North East GA

Further used vehicles acquired are Scania L94UB/Wright Solar B43F 4991/2 (YR02 ZYK/M), ex-Anglian, Beccles.

Competing services of Bob Smith Coaches, Langley Park were taken over in late-January. Routes involved are between Langley Park, Sacriston and Durham City, but no vehicles were involved in the deal.

Optare MetroRiders 413/5-7 (N413 NTN, P415-7 VRG), DAF SB220/Optare Delta 4736 (G736 RTY) and Volvo B6 8417 (L417 KEF) have been withdrawn. Leyland Nationals 4681, 4711 (UPT 681V, FTN 711W) have returned to driver training.

Gordon, Rotherham

New Volvo B12B/Plaxton Panther C34F B18 WGS carries a black and silver livery and is kitted out for use by local football teams. Volvo B7R/Plaxton Prima YS02 YYD and Mercedes Vario O814D/Plaxton Cheetah YJ05 TWW (*B17 WGS*) have been sold.

Grant Palmer, Dunstable

Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties B88 BUS ex-Mitchell, Plean reverted to original registration B125 TVU before entry into service.

Former CentreWest Mercedes-Benz 811D/Alexander F685 XMS, Grant Palmer's first minibus purchase after setting up in 2000, has gone to Erith Commercials for scrap.

Green Bus, Great Wyrley, Staffs

Former Stagecoach North West Mercedes-Benz 709D/Alexander 18 (K623 UFR) is another acquired here.

Gwynfor, Gaerwen, Anglesey

Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Optare Nouvelle 2 PY52 JJK is in stock.

Halifax Joint Committee

MCW Metrobus 81 (GYE 381W) has been traced to Visibuzz of Peautie, Belgium.

Hanson, Stourbridge

The first new buses for this fleet are 10.7m Alexander Dennis Pointer Darts BV55 UPA, URA. Also acquired is Dennis/Plaxton Mini Pointer Dart KP02 PUU.

Dart/Carlyle H879 LOX and H847 NOC have been sold to Travel Express, Wolverhampton, and similar G518 VYE has been broken up for spares. Thanks to Bus Service Manager I. Kimberley for this update on his fleet.

Harrogate & District TD

Refurbishment of Volvo B6BLEs 601-9/11-5 has begun with 601 (W601 CWX), now fitted with a powered wheelchair ramp; work, at Burnley, is scheduled to take between three and four weeks per vehicle.

Ex-Burnley & Pendle Volvo B7TL/Plaxton President 2705 (Y705 HRN) has been repainted in 770 Shuttle red/white livery colours; 2711 (Y711 HRN) remains in red/cream, but is to transfer to Yorkshire Coastliner. B7RLE 1800 (YK04 JYP), the spare for service 36, has been repainted from 36 black/chrome and into a new livery for the Harrogate-Knaresborough service, which has been increased in frequency. Until the new B7TL/Wright Gemini arrives for the 36, there is no spare liveried vehicle for the service.

Hedingham Omnibuses

The last ex-Partridge coach, Leyland Tiger/Plaxton L233 (F148 SPV) has been withdrawn.

Hopley, Truro

Former Eastern Counties Bristol VRT/SL3/ECW KVF 248V is used on schools services.

Below: L669 MSF is one of four ex-Stagecoach Merseyside Volvo B6s with Alexander Dash bodywork added recently to Hulme Hall Coaches' fleet. It spent the first year of its life with Fife Scottish. JOHN YOUNG

Hulley, Baslow
The new Optare Solo SlimLine, 1 (MX06 ACV), replaces the previous No1, Mercedes 711/Onyx C24F N847 YHH, sold to Abbey, Hull.

Huntingdon & District
Optare Tempo demonstrator YJ55 BLX has been used on the Huntingdon-Cambridge corridor.

Hulme Hall, Cheadle Hulme
Bristol VR WTU 468W has been sold to a local church group. Ex-Arriva the Shires & Essex Volvo B10M F151 KGS has received fleet livery. F153 KGS is still being prepared for service. F152 KGS remains in use with Arriva at High Wycombe.

Hutt, Finstock, Oxfordshire
Former Black Prince, Morley Scania N113CRB/Alexander 113 (F113 OMJ) has been acquired via Blythswood, Glasgow (dealer).

Huyton Travel
New are Alexander Dennis Mini Pointer Darts SN06 BLZ, BMO/U/V/Y/Z.

Imperial, Rainham
MCW Metrobus GBU 2V came from James Bevan, Lydney (not Jones, Lydney).

Independent Coach, Quedgeley, Gloucester
R270 THL is a Dennis Javelin/Neoplan Transliner, thought from Evergreen, Birmingham. Ex-East Yorkshire Leyland Tiger/Plaxton Paramounts A415 TAG and B11 GRC are here for schools work.

Ipswich Buses
Six Scania N94UD OmniCitys have been ordered, and it is possible some double-deck versions may follow.

DAF DB250/East Lancs Myllennium Lowlander 56 (PN52 XBK) has returned to Blackburn for major attention, to stop water ingress. Also in difficulty is hybrid Optare Solo 245 (YJ05 XNY). It was delivered (five months late) at the end of August last, broke down on 9 September and has been unavailable ever since; it was still at the premises of Eneco, supplier of its hybrid drive pack, in March.

K-Line, Honley, W Yorks
New are VDL SB200/Wright Commander B44F 25 (YJ55 WTD) and BMC Falcon/B40F 30 (BX55 NZU). A new, unregistered B57F BMC 220 Condor yellow school bus has been delivered.

The mobile canteen/drivers' shuttle Optare MetroRider 10 (J720 CUM) reported last month suffered engine failure and has been sold to Morley Waste Traders, Huddersfield for scrap. Its replacement is 12 (L731 NWW). Dennis Dart 18 (UOT) has gone to Glasgow Citybus.

Kimes, Folkingham, Lincs
Scania N113DRB/Alexander 77 WAZ 8277 (*F314 RHK*) has gone to nearby Tudor Coaches, Great Casterton.

The Kings Ferry, Gillingham, Kent
Two Setra Comfort Class S416 GT-HD C53Ft 13m coaches have joined the fleet. At the other end of the scale, further new additions are B28F Plaxton Primos B1, 2 (MX06 ADU/Z) in white livery for the Chatham Maritime Shuttle service between Chatham station, Pentagon bus station and the shopping centre at the former Dockyard.

Kirkby Lonsdale Coach Hire
A recent acquisition is Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton DP29F PO51 WNP from Holmes, Clay Cross.

KMP, Llanberis
The sixth new Volvo B7RLE/Wright Eclipse Urban B44F here, K7 KMP, arrived in February, joining, in order of arrival, N777, L77, L777, A7, M7 KMP.

Ex-Travel West Midlands MCW Metrobus MkII C889 FON is an acquisition, in yellow schools livery.

Lakeland, Hurst Green, Lancs
Until the new Scania coach is delivered, Scania/Irizar C49Ft YN55 NFR has been on loan. DAF SB220/East Lancs Myllennium X685 REC has passed to Scania, Worksop (dealer).

Lawman, Kettering
New are Volvo B12B/Van Hool Alizée 32/3 (YJ06 GLY/Z).

Above: The Kings Ferry B2 (MX06 ADZ) is one of the two Plaxton Primos acquired from Mistral for the Chatham Dockside Shuttle service. RICHARD GODFREY

Leon, Stafford
AT06 LCT is a new Bova Magiq/C49Ft, in a special one-off livery of metallic maroon and silver. It appeared on the Bova stand at Coach & Bus Live last October.

BT/CT/DT/ET/FT06 LCT are new Scania/Berkhof Axial 50 C55Ft, ET and FT lettered for Dunwood Travel Contract. The next two Scania/Irizar Century C49Ft are expected as GT/HT06 LCT.

Scania/Van Hool Alizées AT/BT/CT02 LCT and Irizar-bodied CT52, AT/BT03 LCT have passed to Scania Bus & Coach (dealer) Worksop. Scania/Van Hool AT/BT52 LCT and BMC schoolbus AT54 LCT have been sold privately and Bova Futura GO51 LCT has gone to Moseley, (dealer), Pontefract.

Limburg Touring, Sheffield
Volvo B10M/Plaxton Paramount 3500 BUI 471 has replaced Scania/Irizar T408 OWA (*BUI 471*).

Lloyd, Bagillt
New is BMC 1100FE/B60F schoolbus BX55 OFM.

Lloyd, Machynlleth
Ex-Stagecoach North West Volvo B10M-55/Alexander PS K773 DAO — acquired ex-Morrow, Glasgow — has replaced rebodied Leyland Tiger AAX 590A.

Lodge, High Easter, Essex
Dennis Javelin/Plaxton C35F F367 MUT is acquired from Thompson, Salisbury and similar but C53F F883 RFP from Harrod, Wormegay, Norfolk. Setra Optimal S210H C30Ft M412 MPD (*WET 476*) has come from Wings, Hayes.

London Central/London General GA
The first of the Alexander Dennis Enviro400 double-deckers on order, E1 (SN06 BNA), was inspected by Dublin Bus in March (see p65). New Volvo B7TL/Wright Eclipse Gemini double-deckers noted at Fleetwood on delivery were been WVL216/20-2/52-7 (LX55 JHK/V/Y, JLO/U/V, JMO/U/V). These were not due into service until 1 April so may have been re-registered.

The balance of the Wright Electrocity hybrid buses are B26D WHY1, 4, 6 (LX55 EAA/F/J); WHY1 is undergoing testing at Millbrook.

London United TD
Volvo Olympian VA47 (R947 YOV) was destroyed by fire on the M3, heading for Eastleigh for repaint. LOTS reports that AEC Routemaster RML2269 (CUV 269C) is owned by François-Xavier Perin, chief executive of Transdev in the UK. Dennis Lance SLF LLW7 (ODZ 8907) has been sold to South Liverpool Commercials.

M Travel, Normanton
Transport Manager Anthony Dee kindly confirms his fleet has been given fleetnumbers in order of acquisition, Metrobuses 01-5/8-11 (POG 496Y/7Y, A682 UOE, A105 WVP, A692 UOE, ROX 629Y, A109 WVP, B877 DOM, POG 607Y) and DAF SB220/Optare Deltas 07, 12 (F702/1 ECC).

McLean, Witney, Oxfordshire
New are Volvo B12B/Sunsundegui FJ06 BTE/F. One is C43Ft, the other C49Ft.

Marchant, Cheltenham
Volvo B7L/Wright Eclipse Metro B41F SA02 CCU, CDE have been acquired from Whitelaw, Stonehouse, for Cheltenham town services F and G.

MASS, North Anston
Optare Excels S160/5 UAL have been sold to Flights Hallmark.

Metrobus GA
Further new Scanias are N94UB OmniTown/ East Lancs Esteem B29D 601-23 (YM55 SWU/V, YN06 JXR, YM55 SWX/Y, YN06 JXS, YM55 SXA-F, YN06 JXT, YM55 SXH, YN06 JXU-X, YM55 SXO/P/R, YN06 JXY/Z) for routes 181 and 284 (Grove Park-Lewisham).

Metroline DG
Further Alexander Dennis Enviro400 H41/26D for Holloway are TE680-6/8-90 (LK55 KKO/P/R-V/Y/Z, KLA) and owing to their later delivery, TE687/91/2 are to be re-registered with 06 registrations.

The London United Darts on loan and First's Dennis Tridents 32806, 32958/9/70/5/8-81/3 were returned in mid-February.

The last day of Dennis Lance SLF operation on the 186 was with LLW33 (L39 WLH) on 22 February. It and LLW28/9, 32/8 (L28 WLH etc) are with UK North.

Myall, Bassingbourn, Cambs
Dennis Dart/Marshall R404 XFL has been acquired from Papworth Hospital.

Below Few operators other than First have Wright Eclipse Metro-bodied Volvo B7Ls with nearside 'shower cubicle' engine compartments. SA02 CCU is half of a pair that Marchant's of Cheltenham has bought ex-Whitelaw's of Stonehouse, Lanarkshire, which in turn has replaced them with new Volvo B7RLEs. RICHARD SHARMAN

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort Delgro

EB Ensignbus

EY EYMS Group

FG FirstGroup

GA Go-Ahead Group

NX National Express Group

ST Stagecoach Group

TD Transdev

TGM Tellings - Golden Miller

VE Veolia

WG Wellglade Group

Above: After 46 years, Plymouth Citybus is poised to withdraw its last Leyland Atlantean. One of its final three, East Lancs-bodied 162 (TTT 162X), was photographed in St Austell in March following sale to Roselyn, Par. TOM BRAUND

Newport Transport
Two more demonstrators tried have been Scania OmniCity CN94UB/B42F YN55 RCY and Optare Tempo YJ55 BLX.

Norfolk Green, King's Lynn
A further Optare Solo acquired is 616 (W5 JPT), ex-JP, Middleton. Further additions to the fleet are ex-Trent Barton Mercedes-Benz Vario/Plaxton Beaver 2 B31F 404/8 (S294/2 UAL).

Northern Star Motor Co, Whitby
A staggering addition to the ranks of sightseeing vehicles in the UK is six-wheel Sentinel steam bus GT 2827, now in normal service on the town tour of Whitby (along with 1929 Dennis charabanc CC 942). The Sentinel's body, mounted on a steam lorry chassis, is a replica.

Nottingham City Transport
Volvo Olympian 490 (P490 CVO) has been repainted into original South Notts navy blue, cream and maroon livery to celebrate 80 years of the company. It re-enacted the first South Notts journey from Gotham Garage to Nottingham at 08.20 on 13 March.

Oare, Holywell
Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton Cheetah YR02 ZLO is an acquisition.

Oxford Bus Company GA
Frequency on the X3 Abingdondirect has been increased to eight buses an hour following Stagecoach's withdrawal of its competing X4. As a result two more B39F Mercedes Citaro O530s are on loan from Wilts & Dorset, to which they have not yet been delivered. They are numbered 898/9 (HF06 FTO/Y).

Volvo B10M/Plaxton Excalibur 9, 10/2 (R9, 10/2 OXF) have gone to Birmingham Coach Company for National Express work. Volvo B10B/Plaxton Verde 612 (N612 FJO) suffered a minor engine fire and a decision on its future is awaited.

Paragon Travel, Stafford
The first double-decker is Leyland Olympian/ECW SHE 310Y from GHA Coaches, Wrexham. Leyland Leopard/Plaxton Bustler OWG 368X was acquired, but quickly suffered failure and was withdrawn.

Pegasus, Guiseley, W Yorks
Another Optare Solo is M850/B29F 202 (VU52 UEE) from Rogers, Horden. Solo YJ54 BTV has been on loan on service 737 (Bradford-Leeds). Ex-Beattie, Renfrew Mercedes-Benz 811D/Alexander B31F J213 AET is numbered 401.

Philips, Holywell
Bedford YNT/Duple IAZ 4016 and Iveco 59.12/Mellor K715 UTT have been sold for scrap.

Plymouth Citybus
Following the sale of 162/70 (TTT 162/70X) respectively to Roselyn, Par and Dart Pleasure Craft, Dartmouth in January, only one Leyland Atlantean — 171 (TTT 171X) — remained in service in February. The PSV Circle says it may be preserved.

Preston Bus
An order is confirmed for a further 13 Optare Solos, to the same specification as recent 81-3, for June delivery, bringing the tally to 33 here. The three new Solos have ousted Optare MetroRiders 2 (M402 TCK), 20/1 (N420/1 GBV), which have been sold to Shamrock, Pontypridd.

The seven Scania L94UB/East Lancs on order are also due in June and will have Esteem bodies.

An interesting proposal is for seven-seat electric minibuses to operate a shuttle service linking the station with the University and shopping centres.

A demonstration vehicle has been on display to the public. Remaining Leyland Atlanteans have had their nearside destination displays removed.

Reading Transport
Scania N94UD OmniDekka/East Lancs 819-34 are expected to be registered YN06 JWC-G/J/L/M/O/P/U-Z, 819-26 light pink for routes 25/26, 827-34 dark pink for 23/24. Pending their delivery, red ex-London Sovereign DAF DB250/Optare Spectras T124/5/7 AUA were hired from Dawsonrentals and numbered 2000-2 for their stay.

Seven new Scania CN230UB OmniCitys, to be numbered 6-12, are expected by October for the Vodafone services.

Optare Excels 901-10 (P901-10 EGM) left Reading on 16 March for Southampton docks *en route* to Ritchie's Coachlines, Auckland, New Zealand, where they will join 20 Excels exported from Reading 12 months earlier, 917-24/37-40/3-50.

Optare MetroRiders 624/7/9 (N624 ATF, R627/9 SJM) were sold to Ensign (dealer) in early March.

Safeguard, Guildford
New 11.3m Optare Tempo YJ06 FXM arrived in March. Modern acquisitions are Volvo B12M/Plaxton Paragon C49Ft YN04 WTL/M from Logan, Dunloy.

Disposals are Van Hool EOS90 C51Ft M623/5 RCP (*196, 277 FCG*), Volvo B9M/Plaxton C39F F296 RMH (*WPG 926*), sold to Westerbus, Gairloch and Toyota/Caetano Optimo L967 RUB (*A20 EFA*), to Barcroft Tours & Events, Hastings.

Heritage AEC Reliance/Burlingham 200 APB celebrates its 50th anniversary. It was delivered in March 1956 but was sold after only seven years. It came back from preservationist Hugh Jones in 2001, in immaculate condition. Thanks go to director Andrew Halliday for updating me on his fleet.

Shamrock, Pontypridd
An impressive new coach is Neoplan Skyliner N122/3L/CH59/24Ct YN55 MNN at Barry, while the same depot's new Setras, BX55 FVU/Y are confirmed as of type S315GT-HD and are C48Ft.

Further Optare MetroRiders are B31F L190 DDW from Cardiff and B25F M402 TCK and B29F N420/1 GBV from Preston Bus.

Mercedes-Benz Vario T304 PNY and ex-Tillingbourne Mercedes-Benz 709D M436 JPD (now allover white) have been reallocated to Abercynon from Pyle. Leyland Tiger/Plaxton Derwent TIL 1183 (*F281 HOD*) is at Barry, ex-Abercynon.

Withdrawn are Leyland Titan A973 SYE and Leyland Olympian D217 FYM. Disposals are of Iveco EuroRider/Beulas X644 GJU to EvoBus, Coventry (dealer) while Leyland Atlantean UJI 8218 (*SCN 271S*) and Leyland Tiger/Plaxton Viewmaster MIL 6782 (*VOY 180X*) appear to have gone for scrap.

Silver Star, Caernarfon
Optare Solo SlimLine M920SL/B28F CX55 DWX is new here, in silver and blue.

Sleafordian, Sleaford, Lincs
A third ex-East Yorkshire Leyland Olympian/ECW is B249 NVN.

Solent Blue Line GA
The new Mercedes Citaros for new Bluestar5 Hythe Waterfront service arrived in late-March. They are 401-10 (HX06 EZA-H/J/Z), to a similar specification to Wilts & Dorset's recent deliveries with 2+1 seating at the front end.

The shelf-company name, Musterphantom Ltd, used by this company since it was set up 19 years ago, was formally renamed Solent Blue Line Ltd on 8 March. Musterphantom is disappearing from legal lettering on buses.

The open-top fleet has been boosted by the loan of Wilts & Dorset Leyland Olympian 4922 (A174 VFM) for the season. In addition to the Southampton Docks Tour, the New Forest Tour is also to be run, but apparently some newer vehicles are due for this.

South Yorkshire, Ackworth

Further to March Fleet News, the second Dennis Falcon is 202 (G388 EKA).

Stagecoach Cambridgeshire ST

Peterborough has 14 new Alexander Dennis Trident/ALX400s for Citi services, 18411-24 (AE06 GZH/J-P/R-W).

Stagecoach Devon ST

Leyland Olympian ONLXB/2RZ/Alexander RL H51/31F 14189 (G189 JHG) has come from Stagecoach North East, Olympian ONLXB/1RH/Northern Counties H43/30F 14510-2 (F510-2 NJE) from Stagecoach East, while Stagecoach London DAF SB220/Optare Deltas 26020/3 (J720/3 CYG) are here as driver trainers.

The PSV Circle reports the withdrawal of fire-damaged Dennis Dart/Wright Handybus 32251 (NDZ 3151), as well as Mercedes-Benz 709D/Alexander 40554 (M354 JBO).

Stagecoach East ST

There was a major influx of new buses over the spring. New double-deckers at Northampton are Alexander Dennis Trident/ALX400s 18400-10 (KX06 JXW, JYC-G, JXT/Y/Z, JYA/B). 18400-3/5/6 were delivered to Stagecoach West for use at the Cheltenham Gold Cup before coming to Northampton, and somehow or other 18404 appeared at Northampton with registration VU06 JBZ, which belongs on Stagecoach West 18436. It has been corrected.

New Optare Solos at Kettering are two-tone green Connect Kettering-liveried 47401-18 (KX55 PEO, PFA/D-G/J/K/N/O/U/V/Y/Z, PGE/F/K/O) while new Alexander Dennis Pointer Darts for Bedford are 34825-35 (KX06 LNV, JYH/J/L/N-P/R-T).

Two more Volvo B10M/Alexander PSs have arrived from Stagecoach Manchester after all; they are 20914/5 (R914/5 XVM) and Volvo Olympians 16004/5 (P804/5 GMU) has gone to Manchester, as have Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties 14506-9/13 (F506 NJE etc), which were new to Cambus; similar 14510-2 (F510-2 NJE) have gone to Devon.

The last bus from the National Bus Company era of United Counties, Leyland Olympian/ECW 14005 (ARP 605X), has been scrapped. Also withdrawn are Leyland Olympians 14036, 14179, 14631 (F636 YRP, C179 ECK, C631 LFT), Mercedes-Benz 709Ds 40137/9/40 (M337/9/40 LHP), 40301/5/43/73/7/80-3 (N301/5 XRP, M343 DRP, L373/7/80 JBD, L381-3 NBD) and Volvo B10M coaches 52120/1/3 (K150/1/3 DNV).

Stagecoach East Midlands ST

Twenty-one new Alexander Dennis Darts due at Grimsby are likely to see off the remaining Dennis Lances and Dominators. New Alexander Dennis Trident/ALX400 double-deckers in Hull include 18426 (YN06 LLV).

Hull expected to receive Leyland Olympian ON2R56G16Z4/Alexander DPH51/31F 14184/6 (G184/6 JHG) and ONLXB/1R/Alexander RH H45/31F 14614/7/48/61 (C614 LFT etc) from Stagecoach North East.

The last manual-transmission coach at Grimsby, Volvo B10M/Plaxton 52095 (J456 FSR), has been replaced by 52213 (L643 LDT). Mercedes-Benz 709Ds 40771/6 (N771/6 EWG) have been sold to Fleetlink (dealer).

Stagecoach Lincolnshire ST

Apparently Stagecoach fleetnumbers are not being applied to vehicles until the Office of Fair Trading completes its clearance of the takeover of Traction Group. Thus the new Volvo B7TL/Wright Eclipse Geminis, though officially 16939-44 (FX06 AOA-F), carry numbers 921-6. Even Stagecoach-standard MAN 18.220, 22365 (SV55 EEN) is numbered 811. It is at Lincoln, not Skegness.

Further new deliveries are Alexander Dennis Pointer Darts 528-31 (FX06 AED-G), which are understood to be Stagecoach 34848-51. Also at Lincoln are two of the Optare Solos listed under Stagecoach Yorkshire last month, M1020/B37F 117/8 (YM55 SVG/J), which are allocated national fleetnumbers 47396/7.

It is reported that 12 DAF SB220/Optare Deltas of the 26003-35 batch are expected from Stagecoach London after conversion from dual-door to single-door.

Alexander RH-bodied Olympians 16841-4 (L648-51 MYG) were new to Keighley & District and are late-model Leylands, not Volvos. Vehicles not listed in March Fleet News and now given Stagecoach numbers are Leyland National 2 297 (UWY 70X), now 25495; Volvo B6R/Alexander Dash 330/3 (K270/3 ERM), now 30958/9, MCW Metrobuses 741/54 (WOI 3001, KWJ 323W), now 15994/30 and the Bristol SC4LK, 2494 (RFE 482) which is 39994. Hired Dennis Dart SLF/East Lancs 524-6 (X524/85/26 XEE) may still be in the fleet, numbered 33253-5.

Contrary to last month's report, there are currently no plans to combine Stagecoach's two Grimsby garages into one.

Stagecoach London ST

Further Alexander Dennis Trident/ALX400 H45/22D are 18481-99 (LX55 BDY/Z, BEO/Y, BFA/E/F, BEJ, LX06 AFZ, AGO/U/V/Y/Z, AHA/C-F). DAF SB220/Optare Deltas 26020/3 (J720/3 CYG) have gone to Stagecoach Devon as driver trainers; 12 others are expected to go to Stagecoach Lincolnshire.

Stagecoach Manchester ST

A significant number of the order for 130 Alexander Dennis Enviro400 double-deckers is expected here. The nine new MAN 18.220/Alexander Dennis ALX300 B42F for the 378 Kick-start scheme are 22391-9 (MX06 LTY/Z, LUA/B/D/E/F/H/L). Five will be branded for the service.

More Volvo B10M-55s transferred to Stagecoach Merseyside are 20898/9, 20945 (R898/9, 945 XVM). Meanwhile B10M-55/Northern Counties DP49F 20602-5 (L602/3 VCD, L424/5 TJK) and B48F 20653/74/7 (R653 HCD etc) have arrived **from** Liverpool, the last three having returned whence they came. These are in strategic reserve at Hyde Road, along with five Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties that arrived from Stagecoach Cambridgeshire on 26 March, 14506-9/13 (F506 NJE etc). Also here (after all) are Volvo Olympian/Northern Counties 16004/5 (P804/5 GMU) from Stagecoach East; B10Ms 20914/5 (R914/5 XVM) have gone to Stagecoach East in exchange. Ex-Glenvale/CMT/ABC DAF SB220/Optare Deltas 26005/6 (L700 ABC, N600 ABC) arrived at Hyde Road for storage on 6 March.

The ex-Dennis's Darts with roller blinds are being fitted with LED displays, 33085/6 (P112/3 OJA) noted so equipped.

Further ex-London taxis for use on remote crew reliefs are 92107 (N610 EBY) along with Metrocabs 92701/3/4 (M873 ALY, P495 LLL, P672 MLH); they are in standard group livery rather than the mainly red London variant. Accident damaged 92106 *Herbie* (G805 VYR) has been withdrawn.

Stagecoach Merseyside ST

Delivery of 34805-20 (PX55 EHB-E, PX06 DVR/T-W/Y/Z, PX06 DWA/C–F) means that all 75 new Alexander Dennis Pointer Darts have entered service.

Further Volvo B10M-55/Alexander PS B49F are 20171/97 (K571 LTS, M597 OSO) from Stagecoach Bluebird and 20898/9, 20945 (R898/9, 945 XVM) from Manchester. 20418/9 (H618/9 ACK) are in store. B10M-55/Northern-Counties Paladin 20602-5 (L602/3 VCD, L424/5 TJK) have moved on to Manchester and 20653/74/7 (R653 HCD etc) have returned there after only a short stay, thus eliminating Paladin-bodied B10Ms from this operation.

DAF SB220/Optare Delta driver trainers 26005/6 (L700 ABC, N600 ABC) are in store at Manchester. Main fleet withdrawals to record are Volvo B6s 30911/21/31/7/9/46/57 (L405/19 JBD, L441/50 LWA, L453 LHL, M676 SSX, M844 EMW) and Dennis Darts 32026 (H547 HGK), 32676/83/5/90/2/7 (J528/51 GCD, K557/71/3 NHC, K586 ODY). 30911, 32026, 32683/5/90/2/7 have been sold. Volvo B6s 30146, 30904/13/8/30/6 (L246 TKA, L279 JAO, L408/13 JBD L440/8 LWA) and Dennis Darts 32667/79, 32914 (K108 XHG, J543 GCD, L113 HHV) have been transferred to Stagecoach Yorkshire. Volvo B6LE 30342 (N416 KPS) is in reserve at Carlisle. Leyland Titans 10257/93, 10570, 10703 (GYE 257/93W, NUW 570Y, OHV 703Y), Leyland Lynxes 29131/40/5/6 (F203 MBT, F521 AEM, G221 DKA, G474 DHF), Volvo B6s 30922/5 (L420 JBD, L435 LWA) and Dart 32699 (K588 ODY) have all been sold. Driver training Volvo B10M/Plaxton Interurban 52146 (K576 DFS) has returned to Chesterfield.

Only eight Volvo B6s, 30652, 30905-7/29/41/2/51 (L652 HKS, M773/20/7 BCS, L439 LWA, M462 VHE, L453 YAC, L833 CDG) remained by late-March, and were not expected to last long.

Stagecoach North East ST

Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer 32749 (L749 VNL) has been repainted in South Shields Corporation blue/primrose livery to mark the centenary of the start of municipal tram operations.

Leyland Olympians 14184/6 (G184/6 JHG), 14614/7/48/61 (C614 LFT etc) have been transferred to Stagecoach East Midlands, 14189 (G189 JHG) to Stagecoach Devon. Dodge Commando driver trainer 48047 (D918 KPT) has been delicensed.

Stagecoach North West ST

Traditional Ribble-liveried Olympian 16635 was launched in a ceremony at Wrea Green on 9 March. It is currently allocated to Chorley, not Kirkby Lonsdale (there isn't a depot there.). Chorley depot broadens its horizons from 23 April when it assumes the operation of some evening

continued overleaf...

Below: The few Stagecoach Lincolnshire buses repainted into group livery include Alexander Dash-bodied Volvo B6R 30186 (J704 BRM). Like the other repaints, it had a Road Car fleetname in the windscreen and only displays Road Car fleetnumber 334. Four of these buses, with early Austrian-built chassis, re-entered Stagecoach service last December following the Traction Group takeover. They were new to Cumberland, but were returned to Volvo when production Scottish-built B6s were delivered. PAUL HARVEY

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort Delgro

EB Ensignbus

EY EYMS Group

FG FirstGroup

GA Go-Ahead Group

NX National Express Group

ST Stagecoach Group

TD Transdev

TGM Tellings - Golden Miller

VE Veolia

WG Wellglade Group

journeys on Greater Manchester service 22 (Bolton-Stockport), previously operated by First Manchester.

Flood-damaged MAN 18.220s 22802/4/11 (V802/4/11 DFV) have been repaired and are at Morecambe for a service upgrade.

Contrary to last month's report, no Optare Solos are expected in West Cumbria.

The former Morecambe & Heysham Corporation depot on Heysham Road, opened in 1939, was bulldozed last December.

Stagecoach Oxfordshire ST

The first of the seven new Alexander Dennis Trident/ALX400s are 18393-9 (KX55 TLK/N/O/U/V/Y/Z). All except 18393 are branded for the 27 (Oxford-Banbury) service.

Stagecoach South East ST

In addition to the five 12m Euro4 Alexander Dennis Enviro300s for Winchester Park & Ride, the other eight Enviro300s ordered by Stagecoach — 12.5m Euro3 models —are for East Kent's Dover Diamond scheme, hence the appearance of Stagecoach North East Enviro300 27509 (NK05 JXH) on route trials.

New Alexander Dennis Pointer Dart/B38F are 34844-7 (GX06 DWV/W/Y/Z) at East Kent for the Thanet Loop service and 34852-8 (GX06 DXA-G) at Hants & Surrey to upgrade service 3.

An updated route branding for Line 3 at Basingstoke has been applied to Dennis Darts 33014-7/30/4/9 (R814-7 HCD, P330 AYJ, P434/79 AYJ). The upgraded Hants & Surrey YoYo service 6 (Farnborough-Prospect Estate) has been a great success, the new Optare Solos on an upgraded 10min frequency resulting in a 32% increase in passengers.

Volvo B10M-55/Northern Counties Paladin DP49F 20601 (L601 VCD) has returned from Stagecoach Merseyside and is in reserve. It is still in white Sainsbury's livery applied for Chichester area services.

Rail replacement unit Leyland Olympians 13629/40 (H495 LNA, G283 YRJ) have been reseated from DPH53/39Ft to DPH53/31F, with enhanced luggage space and cycle space. 13629 as well as 13646/52 (H463/2 EJR) wear the attractive South West Trains livery.

Worthing's ex-London Dart/Plaxton Pointer 34197 (W197 DNO) has been converted to single-door by Salvador Caetano at Waterlooville and sports an LED destination display. TransBus Dart 34445 (GX53 MWL) has been back to Alexander Dennis in connection with its experimental Voith gearbox. Ex-Hong Kong Dart 32449 (401 DCD) has been re-registered N978 RCD.

Heritage East Kent AEC Regent V 19946 (MFN 946F) is being repainted in traditional East Kent maroon and cream at Ashford (after other work at Thanet), ready for the company's 90th anniversary this year. After being repainted in a special Christmas scheme based on standard Stagecoach livery, Olympian 14808 (H808 BKK) is also in traditional East Kent colours.

Above: Stagecoach North East 32749 (L749 VNL), the Plaxton Pointer-bodied step-entrance Dennis Dart repainted in South Shields Corporation livery for the centenary open day held at the depot there on 1 April. JOHN HART

Stagecoach Wales ST

Optare Tempo demonstrator YJ55 BLX has been on loan at Merthyr for driver familiarisation.

Further Volvo B10M/Jonckheere C44Ft from Stagecoach East Midland are 52602/35 (S174 SVK, S665 CDT), but they have not been used, nor has 52603 even though it was repainted in Red & White Coaches livery and upseated (understood to C51Ft).

Vehicles reinstated and reallocated to the Glyn Williams depot at Pontllanfraith are Volvo B10M-55/Alexander 20420 (H620 ACK), Dennis Dart/Wright 32964/94 (M64 HHB, K94 AAX) and Dart/Plaxton 32988 (L270 EHB). Mercedes-Benz 709D 40557 (M357 JBO) is a crew ferry vehicle at Cwmbran.

Thanks to Dave B. Thomas for this and other notes.

Stagecoach West ST

The takeover of Dukes Travel's bus services and nine vehicles took place on 20 March. Full details next month of the vehicles involved plus those transferred.

New Alexander Dennis Pointer Dart/B38F for Cheltenham District are 34836-42 (VU06 HZV-Z/JAO/JBE). Also due is similar 34843 (VU06 JBO) to be allocated to Cheltenham & Gloucester at Gloucester.

Volvo B10M coach 52265 has been repainted into fleet livery after operating in white for a year. A further Volvo B10M-55/Alexander refurbished is Swindon & District 20688 (N408 LDF).

Vehicles back in service with Cheltenham & Gloucester from the reserve fleet are Dennis Dart 32241 (K986 CBO) and Mercedes Benz 711Ds 41152/9 (N152/9 MTG), while Cheltenham & Gloucester Volvo B6 30711 (L711 FWO) and Dennis Dart 32085 (M85 WBW) have been placed in reserve.

Cheltenham District Dennis Darts 32937/62/3 (M86 DEW, N62/3 MTG) have transferred to Cheltenham & Gloucester. Leyland Lynx 29614, used latterly as a driver trainer at Stroud, has been delicensed. Swindon & District Volvo B10M/Plaxton Premier Interurban 52157/8 (L157/8 JNH) have been withdrawn. Sold to Wigley (dealer), Barnsley is Leyland Olympian/Optare 14502 (E502 LFL).

Stagecoach Yorkshire ST

More vehicles transferred from Stagecoach Merseyside are Volvo B6/Alexander Dash B40F 30146, 30904/13/8/30/6

Below: At the photographer's request, Stagecoach North West has repainted Northern Counties Palatine-bodied Volvo Olympian 16635 (P235 VCK) in 1960s Ribble livery. It joins buses in Barrow and Morecambe & Heysham heritage liveries and was selected because, like 'real' Ribble buses, it has a CK (Preston) registration. In this view at Wrea Green, its destination is set for route 126, which in the era of Ribble trunk routes connected Bolton, Chorley, Preston and Blackpool. Just visible on the right is a preserved Ribble Leyland TD5. DOUGLAS BAILEY MBE

Left: Pending full introduction of the new owner's computer system, Stagecoach Yorkshire buses carry Stagecoach and former owner Yorkshire Traction's fleetnumbers. East Lancs Myllennium-bodied DAF SB220 26112 (X212 HHE) — a combination new to Stagecoach — displays old number 212 below the offside front headlamps. BEN MORROLL

Above: TM Travel, the first operator to take delivery of a new Plaxton Primo midibus, also has YN06 CYO, the first production Plaxton Centro body — on a VDL SB120 chassis. JOHN MOORE

(L246 TKA, L279 JAO, L408/13 JBD L440/8 LWA), Dennis Dart/Alexander Dash B40F 32667/79 (K108 XHG, J543 GCD) and Dart/Northern Counties B34F 32914 (L113 HHV).

New Optare Solo M1020/B37F YM55 SVG/J reported last month have gone to Stagecoach Lincolnshire, while YM55 SVK/L have been numbered 47398/9.

The PSV Circle reports the withdrawal of Optare MetroRiders 47953/4/62 (M201/2 URC, N210 VRC).

Stansted Transit

Two former Travel London Dennis/Plaxton Mini Pointer Darts are YT51 EAF/M, new with Connex Bus for route G1 as DP6, 10 and now on Essex County Council route 73A in the Chelmsford area.

Stephenson, Rochford, Essex

This operator's Alexander Dennis Super Pointer Dart, EU05 CZA, is the newest bus in Southend. It works tendered services to Shoeburyness via Little and Great Wakering in the main and is in Day-Glo green and white fleet livery with now-standard green/yellow fleetnames.

Leyland Olympian/ECW JFR 4W, the last in Southend's long history of open-toppers, has been exported to Bulgaria.

Stott, Milnsbridge, W Yorks

Acquisitions are Volvo B10M-62/Plaxton C49Ft R480 GLG (*SEL 392*) new to Selwyn, Runcorn and similar but C53F W483 ASB (*HSK 652*), new to Park, Hamilton.

Swan, Chadderton

A new Alexander Dennis Mini Pointer Dart is MX55 XKK, used on service 289 (Altrincham-Northwich).

Swanbrook, Cheltenham

Optare Solo BU51 OWL is confirmed as acquired from Roy Brown, Builth Wells. Mercedes-Benz Vario S532 GHT has been on loan from dealer Malcolm Watkins.

Talisman, Great Bromley, Essex

A notable addition is Leyland Olympian/Alexander DPH57/45F J534 CEV (*FC 1714*) ex-China Light & Power (operated by Hong Kong Citybus).

Thamesdown Transport

Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer 101/2/4 (K101/2/4 OMW), 113/4/6/8 (M113 BMR etc) have been withdrawn following delivery of new Scanias 501-10. Dennis Dominator/East Lancs 72 (H972 XHR) is in fleet livery ex-overall advertisement for Hot Cats

Rental Optare Solos 401-3 (MX54 KXO, MX05 OTN/P) have returned to Mistral Bus & Coach (dealer).

Thomas, Barry

New is BX55 FXZ, a 13m Setra S416 GT-HD C36Ft with leather seats, six tables and servery for use as the Cardiff City FC team coach.

Thornes, Hemingbrough, N Yorks

The heritage fleet has been boosted with the return to service after 35 years of 1952 former Maidstone & District Beadle/Leyland integral 32 (OKP 980). Restored in full M&D livery, it is one of only five Beadle Leylands known to survive. The restoration took six years during which time it was registered VSJ 566. The return of its registration required Volvo B10M/Plaxton Supreme 136 (OKP 980, *N200 VHO*) to be re-registered SHO 800 and B10M/Plaxton Excalibur 135 (SHO 800, *M200 VHO*) to SED 232 from another heritage vehicle here, a former Gorwood's Coaches 1958 Bedford SB/Duple Vega, now being restored and re-registered 696 UXO.

The rural bus service network operated under the Rural Rambler banner since 2000 has been rebranded The Coachman's Way. The last of the seven ex-British Airways Scania K112CRB/Plaxton Bustlers in the associated **Independent Coachways, Horsforth** fleet, 117 (C932 VLB), has been withdrawn.

I'm grateful to managing director Philip Thornes for this useful update.

TM Travel, Staveley, Chesterfield

The first production Plaxton Centro B40F-bodied VDL SB120 has entered service here registered YN06 CYO.

Another ex-Arriva London Leyland Olympian/Northern Counties via Ensignbus (dealer), Purfleet, is G523 VBB.

Travellers Choice, Carnforth

New are Volvo B12B/Jonckheere C49Ft PE55 WLG and 13m Scania K-series/Berkhof C57Ft PE55 WLH/J.

Volvo/Jonckheere X111, 222 LGH have been re-registered XDL 521, EBL 509; Y693, 724 HEC are 9201 FH, 7962 IL. As a result, Volvo/Plaxton 9201 FH has reverted to N48 MDW, 7962 IL to N160 GRN and EBL 509, XDL 521 to P957/60 YGG respectively.

Travel London NX

Further Birmingham-registered Volvo B7TL/Wright Eclipse Gemini H45/24D are V66-9 (BX55 XNV-Y/Z).

Travel West Midlands NX

Scania N113CRB/East Lancs B45F K410/1 MSL were transferred here in March.

It seems that ex-Travel London Optare Solos S231-40 EWU *have* been numbered 3231-40. 3234 is at Perry Bar, 3236 at Coventry and 3237 at Pensnett.

Withdrawn are Leyland Lynxes 1123/68/83/90, 1231 (G123 EOG etc). Lynxes 1178/81 (G178/81 EOG), MCW Metrobuses 2867/89 (B867 DOM, C889 FON) have been sold. Volvo B6LE 505 (P505 EJW) has gone for scrap.

Tudor Coaches, Great Casterton, Lincs

Scania N113DRB/Alexander H47/31F F314 RHK (*WAZ 8277, F314 RHK*) has been acquired from Kimes, Folkingham.

Tyne Blue Line, Low Prudhoe

Former Go North East DAF SB220/Optare Delta G744 RTY has been stored unused since acquisition. The Dennis Dart/Carlyle referred to in March Fleet News is H922 LOX, from Arriva Southend.

UK North, Gorton

Further Volvo B6s in GM Buses livery are ex-Go North East Alexander-bodied 164-7/70/2/3 (L413/4/6 KEF, M418 PVN, M433 RDC, L406 GDC, M423 PVN) bringing the B6 total to 24. L401/3/4 FVN, L410 GPY are numbered 157/9-61. Some of the B6s are route-branded for the increased frequency on service 192 from 26 March, including 155/64-7/70/3.

Also acquired are ex-Metroline Dennis Lance SLF/Wright Pathfinder 120/2/4/5 (L28, 32/8/9 WLH); 120/2/5 are branded for service 192.

Unilink, Southampton

The last two of Wilts & Dorset's recent Mercedes-Benz Citaros, HF06 FUA/B, have been diverted here and are in fleet livery.

WA Shearings

New are Volvo B12M/Van Hool Grand Tourers 801/4/7/8/10 (MX06 AKN/U/Z, ALO, AMK), more B12M/Plaxton Grand Tourers, 813/5 (MX06 AMV, ANP) and B12M/Plaxton Premier Class C42Ft 820 (MX06 AOB).

continued overleaf...

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort Delgro

EB Ensignbus

EY EYMS Group

FG FirstGroup

GA Go-Ahead Group

NX National Express Group

ST Stagecoach Group

TD Transdev

TGM Tellings - Golden Miller

VE Veolia

WG Wellglade Group

Above: The pilot version of the new Network Warrington livery on VDL SB120/Wright Merit 40 (DG53 FJU). CARL KIRKHAM

More renumberings are of 761-77 (GT03 AAA, BBB, CCC, DDD, EEE, FFF, GGG, HHH, JJJ, KKK, LLL, MMM, PPP, SSS, TTT, VVV, WWW) to 541-50 and 781-90 (GT02 BUS/Z, WAG/M/P/R/S/X/Y/Z) to 441-50.

National Holidays has B12M/Plaxton C50F 225-7 (W287/26/7 JBN) as 945-7, B12M/Plaxton C48Ft 451/2/7/8 (YC02 CFJ/K/U/V) as 990/2/87/8 and 560/76-9 (YJ03 VOM/F-H/K), fleetnumbers for the last being subject to confirmation.

907/8/16/8/20 (N218/21 HWX, N371/4/80 EAK) have been sold to Plaxton, Anston (dealer), 902-4/17/9/21/34/5 (KSU 556/65, OKX 373, N373/9 EAK, P170 NAK, P339/42 VWR) to Volvo, Loughborough (dealer); 917 passed to Hookways, Meeth.

Both of Wallace Arnold's former Southdown 'Queen Mary' Leyland Titan PD3/4s, BUF 267, 425C, have been sold to a preservationist in West Yorkshire.

Warrington Borough Transport

VDL SB120/Wright Merit 40 (DG53 FJU) is in a pilot scheme for a new livery. The basic colour remains red, albeit slightly lighter than used recently. There is a broad ivory arc from bottom to top from the front to the front wheelarch and an orange semi circle from the top of the wheelarch through the first bay, coming down again in the fourth bay, to the bottom of the window. The fleetname is a large Network (in white) Warrington (in orange) with Warrington Borough Transport in white underneath. The scheme may be altered before adoption. It is anticipated that about a dozen reliveried vehicles will be in service when the new bus station opens in May.

Fleetnumbers of low-floor single-deckers (1-58) have caught up with the last acquired double-deckers (ex-Dublin 59-62 and ex-Blazefield 63-70), so some renumbering is expected. Dennis Dart SLF 14 (V214 JLG) has returned from repairs at MCV.

Left: Open-top BUF 267C — photographed in Leeds in August 2002 — is one of the two ex-Southdown 'Queen Mary' Northern Counties-bodied Leyland Titan PD3/4s that WA Shearings has sold to a preservationist. TONY WILSON

Left: Latest additions to UK North's GM Buses fleet are some of the earliest low-floor buses in Britain — ex-Metroline Dennis Lance SLFs with Wright Pathfinder bodies. They are branded prominently for trunk route 192, on which GM Buses has intensified competition with Stagecoach Manchester. LUKE GOTTARD

Weavaway, Newbury.

New is Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D/Plaxton Cheetah C33F YN06 CVX. Expected shortly are WA06 GSU/V, the first of four C53Ft Bova Magiq HD122.340s and three Volvo B7RLE/Wright Eclipse Urban B44F, two of which will operate newly won Wiltshire contracts for routes 46/48/70.

Recent Scania K/Irizar PBs YN55 PZB/K/S/T have been named *Buzz*, *Knightrider*, *Skywalker* and *Terminator*. PZS has also been downseated to C39Ft with eight permanent tables.

Disposals include Bovas W197 EJO (*W11 WAY*) to SM Coaches, Byfleet (not Harlow as previously reported), WA53 FDG to Milligan, Mauchline, RG02 NMM (*OO02 TEN*) to APT, Rayleigh, MAN/Noge WT52 EGG to Redwood, Hemyock, all via Scania, Worksop (dealer).

Former Vince, Burghclere Dennis Javelin/Berkhof V862 FPF passed to Carmel, Northlew and Bedford YMT/Duple KRY 768V is with Grosvenor, Motcombe, both via Moseley dealer. Dennis Condor B10 MSC has passed to Southdown PSV, Copthorne (dealer), for sale on Weavaway's behalf.

DAF SB220/Optare Delta S222 AJW has been painted overall purple and is to revert to S160 JUA before going to Southdown PSV (dealer) along with MCW Metrobuses B10 MSC/E as part-exchange for the three Volvo B7RLEs. W18 CKY, R19 CES, B10 MTT and B10 MNX are reverting to their original registrations, W341 MKY, T908 LKE, T725 JHE, S330 SET, repainted white before disposal to Moseley (dealer).

Whittlebus EY

The new Volvo B12B/Plaxton coaches are C49Ft-seated 65 (VX55 OBU), C57F-seated 66 (VX55 OBV) and C53F-seated 67/8 (VX55 OBW/Y). Ex-Travel London Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer Y214 HWJ has been acquired.

Plaxton (dealer), Anston has taken Iveco EuroRider/Beulas coaches 23, 36 (FJ03 ZTU/Y), while Dennis Dart/Northern Counties Paladins 6, 33 (K6, 33 GOW) have been sold, 6 to Eastwood (dealer), Birmingham.

Williams, Criccieth

Ex-Stagecoach Devon Mercedes-Benz 709D/Alexander B25F HIL 5676 (*L696 CDD*) has been acquired.

Gwyn Williams, Lower Tumble

New is Alexander Dennis Enviro300 GW55 SON for infrequent but busy service 100 to Swansea, where it replaces a Leyland Tiger coach.

Wilts & Dorset GA

The last 10 B39F Mercedes Citaros materialised with 06 registrations, not as shown last month. 171-80 are thus HF06 FTO/P/T-V/X-Z, FUA/B. However, 179/80 have been diverted to Unilink, Southampton, and have been repainted in Unilink livery while 171/7 are on loan to Oxford Bus Company and went straight there from EvoBus in March.

Reader Bryan Bird points out that, contrary to March Fleet News, Leyland Olympians 4906/7 are registered A989/90 XAF.

Winson, Loughborough

Leyland Olympian/ECW CWR 525Y is here from Lancashire United.

Yorkshire Coastliner TD

New Volvo B7TL/Wright Eclipse Gemini H41/28F here are 405/6/7/9 (YK55 ATN/O/U/X). Volvo Olympian/Alexander Royales 432/3/4/6/7 (W432 CWX etc) have been sold to First Somerset & Avon. 437 was the last home-market Olympian.

Zara, Halesowen

Former Greater Manchester MCW Metrobus ANA 190Y is in use.

ISLE OF MAN

Isle of Man Transport

Several long withdrawn former Isle of Man Road Services/National Transport buses went for scrap at the start of the year. These included Leyland National 11351/1R 27 (MAN 27H), the last bus delivered to Isle of Man Road Services before nationalisation in October 1976, which ended its use as a youth bus in Peel last October; similar 26 (MAN 26H) had ended up at a camp site and 1977 National 11351A/1R 29 (MAN 29N) was latterly the Department of Education's youth 'Buzz Bus'.

Regrettably, one of only two remaining 1950s buses on the Isle of Man, former IoMRS 1957 Leyland Tiger Cub/Weymann 8 (WMN 8) passed to Manx Metals, Balthane in March; despite strenuous efforts to secure a reprieve, it was scrapped within 24hr of arrival.

Happily, two local enthusiasts have removed former Portsmouth Leyland Atlantean/Alexander 135 (CMN 35C, *UOR 321T*) from Ronaldsway Airport for restoration.

Premier Driving School

Dennis Javelin/Duple C57F MAN 505F (*G47 HDW*) has been acquired from County Coaches, Stockport for driver training. It was new to Bebb, Llantwit Fardre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My thanks to each of the following for giving up your time to write to me with your news, by e-mail and letter this month:
N. Ames, Andrew Babbs, Andrew Bagshaw, David Balme, Chris Barker, Bill Barlow, Stephen Barton, David Bennett, Michael Bewes, Kenneth Bladon, Derek Bradfield, British Bus Publishing, British Trolleybus Society, *Bus Fare*, Cambridge Omnibus Society, *Cambus*, Roger Carey, Anthony Carver-Smith, Chalkwell Coach Hire, Paul Chancellor, Andrew P. Churchill, Jeff Clayton, Kevin Cliffe, Brian Coney, Chris Corroy, Richard Cranmer, Crosville Enthusiasts Club, Cumbria Transport Society, Anthony Dee, Dave B. Derwent, Nigel Diplock, Richard Dodge, Julian Dolman, Nick Doolan, Clive Eglinton, Ensignbus, Essex Bus Enthusiasts Group, *Essex Bus News*, Matthew Evans, Nick Field, Ian Francis, James Freeman, Fylde Tramway Society, David Garney, Wesley Goodwin, Greater Manchester Transport Society, Peter Guppy, Colin Hall, Andrew Halliday, Dave Harries, Adrian Healey, Phil Hiles, Paul N. Hill, Tony F. Hunter, Paul D. Johnson, *The Journal*, David Jukes, Steven Knight, Lancaster & Morecambe PSV Society, *Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire Transport Review*, London Omnibus Traction Society, Christopher Lowe, M&D and East Kent Bus Club, *M&T News*, David McGow, Merseyside Bus Club, Metroline, Geoff Mills, Ian Moorcroft, Tim Moss, Keith Nason, James Neale, Geoff Nelson, Ross Newman, Simon Nicholas, Billy Nicol, David A. Noddings, Northern Group Enthusiasts Club, PSV Circle, Tim Padgett, Deric Pemberton, James Penton, Bob Perrin, John Podgorski, T. S. Powell, H. Powell, Ribble Enthusiasts Club, Graham Richardson, M. G. Robins, David Robinson, Dave Russell, Philip Sankey, Phil Shafe, Norman Sharrock, Sheffield Omnibus Enthusiasts Society, Ian Simpson, Adrian C. Small, R. G. Smith, Southdown Enthusiasts Club, Eric Speckman, Alan Spencer, Staffordshire Bus Enthusiasts Group, Stagecoach Lincolnshire, Stagecoach Manchester, Stagecoach Transit, David Stanier, Daniel Stazicker, Chris Stewart, John Taylor, Thamesdown Transport, Dave B. Thomas, Steve Thompson, Nick Thomson, Transpire — The Chesterfield Bus Society, United Enthusiasts Club, Alan O. Watkins, J. Watson, Michael P. Webster, *Wessex bi-monthly Transport Review*, Wessex Transport Society, *West Yorkshire Information Service*, *West Yorkshire Metro Transport News*, Wheels, Steve White's website (spw24.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk), Lee Whitehead, Dave Wilder, Gary Williams, Trystan Williams, Wilts & Dorset, John Young, Jim Young.

FLEET IN FOCUS

FLEET:	Hornsby Travel Services Ltd
BASED:	Head office and depot, 51 Ashby High Street, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire.
WEBSITE:	www.hornsbytravel.co.uk
FOUNDED:	1914 by Mr J. Hornsby, using the fleetname 'Primrose Motors', which continued until 1950.
WHERE DOES IT OPERATE?:	Twenty-two routes operated, some of them school services and some only on certain days. Operates three circulars in Scunthorpe, one each in Brigg and Barton Upon Humber. Local services in the Scunthorpe area are maintained by low-floor single-deckers. Regular services also run between Scunthorpe and Brigg, Appleby, Hibaldstow, Barton, Crowle, Kirton in Lindsey and Westwoodside. Also operates a coach tour holiday programme.
LIVERY:	Was light blue with thick dark blue skirt separated by a red coach line, but many buses now have silver instead of light blue. Buses carry Hornsby Travel fleetname, Coaches carry Hornsby Holidays fleetname, and also have a light blue coach line.
HOW MANY VEHICLES?:	Thirty-four (13 single-deckers, of which 12 — six Pointer Darts and six DAF SB120/Wright Cadets — are low-floor; seven minibuses; five double-deckers (three Leyland Olympians and two MCW Metrobuses); nine coaches). Most coaches have RH (Ralph Hornsby) registrations.
NEWEST VEHICLES?:	TransBus Pointer Dart SN03 LGA was acquired last October.
ON ORDER?	Two Volvo B7R/Plaxton Profile coaches due later this year.
MOST INTERESTING VEHICLE?:	Over the years, there have been many secondhand double-deckers for stage and contract work. The first, acquired in 1948, was an ex-Manchester Crossley Condor, and later purchases included ex-London RTLs and DMSs, AEC Regent Vs from Oxford, Rhondda and Western Welsh, Renowns from Oxford and Leyland Atlanteans from Ribble, Maidstone & District, Nottingham and West Yorkshire PTE. The first new Roe-bodied Atlantean arrived in 1977. Today's most notable is an ex-Dublin Alexander-bodied Olympian. Nicholas Hornsby is most proud of Northern Counties-bodied Renault PR100 WUK 155, which was acquired in 1991 after serving as a demonstrator for three years. It was one of only five operated in this country. Sister vehicle G276 VML, acquired in 1994 from Parfitt's of Rhymney Bridge after serving with London Buses, lasted for 10 years before going to the scrapyard. WUK does a school contract of around 30 miles per day, and still performs well.

Left: H479 PVW, Hornsby's ex-Dublin Bus Leyland Olympian with Alexander (Belfast) RH-type body, in Scunthorpe bus station. DANIEL STAZICKER

Below: The surviving Renault PR100, WUK 155, still operates a daily school contract. Renault teamed up with Northern Counties to offer a British version of its French citybus, but only sold five of them. Besides Hornsby's two ex-demonstrators, three undertook airside and landside duties at Luton Airport. ANDREW JAROSZ

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services
DG Comfort Delgro
EB Ensignbus
EY EYMS Group
FG FirstGroup
GA Go-Ahead Group
NX National Express Group
ST Stagecoach Group
TD Transdev
TGM Tellings - Golden Miller
VE Veolia
WG Wellglade Group

Scottish reports should be sent, please, to: **Sandy Macdonald, 12 Morton Gardens, Maxwell Park, Glasgow, G41 4AF** to reach him by **16 May** for the **July** issue.

A1 Coach Services, Methil
Services registered from 5 May comprise FL1 (Methil, Laburnum Road-Cupar Trading Estate via Leven and Craigrothie), FL2 (Methil, Sear Road-Cupar Trading Estate via Coaltown of Balgownie, Glenrothes and Kettlebridge) and FL3 (Methilhill-Cupar Trading Estate via Leven, Glenrothes and Kettlebridge).

Abbot, Loanhead
Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-61 HIL 8645 (*D539 MVR*) passed to Ayrways, Patna in February.

Aberfeldy Motors
Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-62 27 (W6 AMS) was sold to Moseley (dealer), Glenmavis in January.

Allander, Milngavie
Former Glasgow City Council Leicester Carriage Builders B24FL-bodied Mercedes-Benz 711D AT89 (N113 NYS) was acquired last August, but is not being used at present.

Sitcar Beluga-bodied Mercedes-Benz O815D AT81 (Y555 GSM) was re-registered AT 2472 last September and then Y573 RSE in November. Bova Futuras AT86/7, 90 (L982 OGY, M272 SBT, P157 XNW) were re-registered 3786 AT, 2367 AT and AT 2472 respectively in October or November (AT90).

Jonckheere-bodied Volvo B10M-62 AT79 (GIL 1685, *Y178 KCS, LSK 555*) was re-registered Y178 KCS before being sold recently to Dewar, Falkirk.

Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1R AT66 (YSO 40Y) and similar ECW-bodied AT70 (AEF 223Y) passed to Jay, Greengairs last August and Arthur, Coatbridge acquired ECW-bodied Olympian AT69 (A236 GHN) in September.

A&P Coaches, Barrhead
Service 8 (Pollok circular) is being cancelled from 28 April, with 19 (Kilbarchan-Braehead shopping centre) and X55 (Auchenback-Glasgow, Renfrew Street) also being given up from 8 May.

Arriva Scotland West AA
February additions from Arriva North East comprised Plaxton Pointer B39F-bodied Dennis Dart SLF 1624 (S624 KHN) and B49F-seated Leyland Lynx driver trainer 9993 (H755 WWW), both of which have been allocated to Johnstone depot.

Although the traffic commissioner has been impressed with progress made in dealing with maintenance problems since the company was called to a public inquiry last year, the operator licence was reduced from 300 to 275 vehicles in March.

Arthur, Coatbridge
ECW H45/32F-bodied Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1R A236 GHN was acquired last September ex-Allander, Milngavie AT69.

Avondale, Clydebank
This company is giving up its operations on services 204/215 (Clydebank-Balloch) on 5 May.

Ayrways, Patna
February additions to this fleet comprise Van Hool Alizée C49F-bodied Volvo B10M-61 HIL 8645 (*D539 MVR*) ex-Abbot, Loanhead and Plaxton C33F-bodied Mercedes-Benz 814D P646 MSE ex-White, Cumnock.

Barrhead Bus Company
New service 22E (Erskine, Barwood Road-Paisley via Renfrew) is being operated by buses in an allover yellow livery with Erskine Travel fleetnames. Those noted when the service started in early April comprised Mellor-bodied Iveco 59.12 L946 EOD last noted with Local Bus Company; Alexander (Belfast)-bodied N183 CMJ previously used in allover silver with route branding for the recently withdrawn Glasgow city centre circular service; Alexander (Belfast) B25F-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D K491 FFS ex-Stagecoach Fife 40091; and Alexander Dash B40F-bodied Volvo B6-50s L659 HKS, M670-2 SSX ex-Stagecoach Fife 30659/70-2.

Blue Bus, Shotts
From 10 April service 77 (Livingston-Carnwath via Lanark) was altered to operate between Livingston and New Lanark.

Brown, Broxburn
Van Hool Alizée C49Ft-bodied Volvo B12B SN05 FLP joined this fleet in February ex-Whyte, Newmachar. Two new Van Hool-bodied Volvo B12Bs and a Sitcar Beluga-bodied Mercedes-Benz O815D are due to be delivered shortly.

Bryans, Denny
KVC M16-bodied Mercedes-Benz 413Cdi SL52 CPE was acquired in December ex-Woods, Tillicoultry.

Bulldog, Bathgate
All commercial services provided by this firm were revised and renumbered from 24 April. Services B3 (Livingston-Deans), B5 (Boghall-Blackridge), B11 (Harthill-Livingston) and B23 (Bathgate-Harthill) were renumbered 103, 105, 111 and 123 respectively, and new circular services 104/105 serve Boghall, Bathgate, Birniehill, Whitburn and Armadale. Bathgate circular B9 was withdrawn while similar B10 was renumbered 110 and revised to operate between Fauldhouse and Bathgate via Whitburn and Armadale.

Coakley, Motherwell
Plaxton Pointer 2 B35F-bodied R176/80 VLA had joined this fleet by March, ex-Metroline Travel DL76, 80, and were being used in their former owner's red and blue colours.

Davidson, Bathgate
Weekday early morning and evening journeys on West Lothian Council service 407 (Bathgate-Loganlea) have been operated since 3 April. New weekday service 90 (Livingston bus station-Bents via Stoneyburn, Loganlea, West Calder and Polbeth) is due to start on 8 May.

DB Travel, Dumbarton
Mellor C33F-bodied Mercedes-Benz 814D N796 PDS joined this fleet in February ex-Rubensaat & Levick, Tamworth.

Deveron, Macduff
Summer weekend service 500 (Cullen-Cairn Mountain Railway via Buckie, Elgin and Dufftown) will operate this year from 13 May until 24 September.

Dickson, Paisley
Plaxton Beaver B25F-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D L258 YOD was acquired in February, having previously been Plymouth Citybus 258.

DJ International, Barrhead
Alexander PS B49F-bodied Volvo B10M-55s K719/32 DAO were acquired from Morrow, Glasgow in March for use on new Monday to Saturday service 17 (Largs-Glasgow, Osborne Street via Kilbirnie, Beith, Paisley and Partick) which is due to start on 9 May.

Docherty, Irvine
Plaxton C49Ft-bodied Volvo B10M-60 A20 SAM was acquired from Paterson, Kilbirnie in March but immediately re-registered J198 OSW as Sam Paterson is to keep its original mark on his car.

In March, Alexander Y-bodied Leyland Leopard PSU3G/4R CSF 159W and similar PSU3F/4R CSF 167W were purchased by West Coast, Campbeltown, while the Gifford Transport Group acquired Alexander T-bodied PSU3G/4R NSF 170Y.

Doig, Glasgow
Irizar-bodied Scania K124 W363 MKY passed to Home James, Speke in December.

Edinburgh Coach Lines
Irizar C49Ft-bodied Scania K114EB4 03 KK 2078 was acquired from B. Kavanagh, Urlingford in January and immediately re-registered PSU 615. The new registration for Kässbohrer Setra S250 PSU 615 (*R847 FSX*) is not known.

Essbee, Coatbridge
Essbee C24F-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D 23 (SF06 HFT) was new in March.

EVE Coaches, Dunbar
Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50 F103 TML had passed to Stuart, Carluke by March.

Fairline, Glasgow
YJ06 FZE/F are further silver-liveried, B22F-seated Optare Solos, which arrived in March for service 905 (Glasgow, Buchanan bus station-Glasgow Airport). C49Ft-seated Bova Futura FHD12-340 SA52 OCX was also acquired in March, ex-Paterson, Kilbirnie.

First Aberdeen FG
Alexander (Belfast)-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 50412 has had its raised rear number display box removed.

62176 is the first of the First Coach-liveried Alexander ALX300-bodied Volvo B10BLEs to be given full Park-&-Ride branding.

Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympians 31537/9 (A108 FSA, B112 MSO) were transferred to First Devon & Cornwall last July and November respectively.

First Edinburgh FG
From 24 April, this company is withdrawing from services

Highland Country 198 (N4 SKY), an Optare Prisma-bodied Mercedes-Benz O405, operating against a wintry Cairngorm landscape in early March.
DANIEL STAZICKER

SCOTTISH COLUMN

SANDY MACDONALD

Scotland's only PTE disappears into statutory regional transport partnership

As a result of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, seven statutory regional transport partnerships (RTPs) — created to 'strengthen the planning and delivery of regional transport to better serve the needs of people and businesses' — came into being throughout Scotland at the beginning of April.

Each brings together local authorities and other key regional stakeholders to take a strategic approach to transport in its region, with boards comprising a mix of elected and non-elected members. Their core task is to prepare and implement a regional transport strategy. Some also inherit existing responsibility for the delivery of transport services — such as the bus services operated by the Dumfries & Galloway and Western Isles councils — and by taking on additional powers which their local authorities have the option to give up to them, it is possible that all RTPs will eventually be in this position.

Five of the RTPs are based on groups of existing local authorities. Central & Tay takes in Angus, Dundee City, Perth & Kinross and Stirling. Highlands & Islands covers Argyll & Bute (except Helensburgh and Lomond), Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highland, Moray and Orkney. North East takes in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. South East covers Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Edinburgh City, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian. And West covers East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire and the Helensburgh and Lomond areas of Argyll & Bute.

Shetland RTP covers Shetland Islands alone, while South West covers Dumfries & Galloway alone.

These new organisations replace the voluntary regional transport partnerships (e.g. Hitrans, Sestrans) that have been in place in northern, eastern and southern Scotland for a few years. In addition, the West of Scotland RTP supersedes not only the Westrans voluntary partnership, but also Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and Executive, set up in 1973 under the Transport Act 1968 and the only PTA/PTE outside England.

The West RTP intends to operate under the name of Strathclyde Partnership Transport, thus avoiding the need to alter the SPT branding on buses, bus stops, ferries, and the Glasgow Subway. Although it has lost its responsibilities to manage surface rail services and bus concessionary travel in its area (see right), its other bus-related responsibilities will probably continue much as before. The 2005 Act has, however, given local authorities and RTPs concurrent new powers to establish statutory quality partnerships and statutory quality contracts for buses, which some local authorities in the West RTP area may eventually choose to use in pursuit of their aims.

New national transport agency for Scotland

Launched in January 2006, Transport Scotland is a new Glasgow-based executive agency directly accountable to Scottish ministers and part of the Scottish Executive's Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department.

Chief Executive Dr Malcolm Reed, previously director general of Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive, is directly accountable to the transport minister. Transport Scotland will work in partnership with private sector transport operators, local authorities and the new statutory RTPs.

The agency is made up of several directorates, dealing with rail service delivery under the Scottish rail franchise arrangements, transport strategy and investment, trunk roads infrastructure, and trunk road network management.

Concessionary bus travel goes nationwide

One of Transport Scotland's first tasks from the beginning of April is running the new national concessionary bus travel scheme.

This allows over one million disabled people and over-60s free bus travel anywhere in Scotland, under an expansion of the service run previously by local authorities. The new National Entitlement Card permits them free access to most local and long-distance buses at any time of the day including morning rush hours. Some airport, night and tour services are deemed to be premium services and are excluded.

The scheme builds on an agreement reached in October 2004 between Scottish ministers and the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which runs for seven years, with a major review after three years. A single reimbursement rate for all operators is capped at £159million in 2006/07 and £163million in 2007/08; these amounts are ring-fenced to ensure that compensation can be paid up to these amounts.

The Scottish Executive is also committed to a free national scheme of bus, rail and ferry concessionary travel for young people, which Transport Scotland will also administer. The executive has still to finalise its proposals for this scheme.

Left: By retaining its predecessor's initials, Strathclyde Partnership Transport does not need to alter the livery or logos on buses like Stagecoach Western 34143 (V143 MVX), an ex-London Dennis Dart/Plaxton Pointer seen in Ayr last summer. DAVID BEARDMORE

14/A (Stirling-Dunfermline) and 23 (Stirling-St Andrews) which it shares with Stagecoach Fife. However, Stagecoach Fife is revising its services on both routes to provide a suitable alternative.

Alexander AY-bodied Seddon Pennine VII ESC 847S, new in 1978 as Eastern Scottish S847 but subsequently Lowland Scottish 47, was acquired by the Gifford Transport Group in March for preservation. Since leaving Lowland in 1988, it has been operated by various firms in Devon, latterly by Town & Country, Newton Abbot.

Following a joint public inquiry into service reliability and maintenance difficulties, including three wheel loss incidents in 2004 and 2005, the traffic commissioner accepted a voluntary undertaking given in March that the vehicle authorisation on the Midland Bluebird and First Edinburgh licences will be reduced from 460 to 297, and from 375 to 230, respectively. The company will also have to provide evidence of its ability to fully staff its registered services out of Dalkeith depot before seeking any further registrations operated from there.

First Glasgow FG

The latest Wright Eclipse Urban-bodied Volvo B7RLE buses to enter service comprise 69025/30/1/3/46/53/5 [SV713/8/9/36/25/32/4] (SF55 UAT/Y/Z, UBT/G/O/R) from Parkhead depot in February; 69032/4-7/51/2/6 [SV720/37-40/30/1/5] (SF55 UBA/U-X/M/N/S) from Scotstoun in February; and 69038-41/57-64/6/7/72-4/6/8 [SV743/1/4-6/51/42/7-9/54/5/60/1/52/0/3/8/66] (SF06 GXJ/G/K-N/H/O/P/R-T, GYB/C, GXV-X/Z, GYJ) from Scotstoun in March. 69065/8-70/7 (SF06 GXU, GYD/E/G/A) were also being used from Scotstoun in March, but their local fleetnumbers are not yet known.

Wright Eclipse Fusion AB55D-bodied Volvo B7LA 10105 [AV5] (V605 GGB) returned from First Somerset & Avon in February, having been in this fleet until October 2001. Wright Crusader 2 B36F-bodied Volvo B6BLE 40563 [MV105] (T312 VYG) was transferred from First Cymru in March and allocated to Motherwell depot. Wright Liberator-bodied Volvo B10L 61522 [SV561] (P763 XHS) also returned to the fleet in March, from First Manchester, and is allocated to Motherwell.

Notable withdrawals in March were of 61345/6 [SS1, 2] (H912 HRO, J113 XSX), the pair of Plaxton Verde-bodied Scania N113CRBs obtained by Strathclyde Buses on extended loan after the Larkfield Depot fire in 1992, numbered C940/1, but subsequently purchased and renumbered in July 1993.

Plaxton-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 50260 (M263 VWU) and similar Marshall-bodied 50474/5 (N525/7 REW) were sold to Munden (dealer), Bristol in December, followed by Plaxton-bodied 50259 (M262 VWU) in January. Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympians 31390/1 [LO78/9] (L178/9 UNS) moved to First Devon & Cornwall in February. All 10 of the former Hong Kong tri-axle Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympians were transferred to First Eastern Counties in March – they comprised 30097-106 [LT1-10] (K481-9/0 EUX, *FW 3858, 2286, 3152, FV 6607, FW 2045,2508,1878,736,2788, FV 7737*). Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50s 31312-5/7/8 [AH57/8,64/5/7/8] (G685/6/92/3/5/6 PNS) also left the fleet in March, for First Devon & Cornwall.

continued overleaf...

GROUP CODES

AA Arriva Passenger Services

DG Comfort DelGro

FG FirstGroup

LB Lothian Buses

NX National Express Group

RN Rapsons

ST Stagecoach Group

Former First Aberdeen Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1R 31530 [LO146] (A101 FSA) was sold in February. Further disposals in March comprised Alexander-bodied Volvo Ailsa B55-10s 31221/3 [A126/9] (B27, 30 YYS) and Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50s 30381, 31208/92, 31305/8/16 [AH81, 5, 28, 95/8, 66] (G525 RDS, A602 TNS, G413 OGD, G539/42 RDS, G694 PNS), all of which were sold to Campbell (dealer), Balloch.

Following maintenance problems considered at a public inquiry some time ago, the traffic commissioner took action against both First Glasgow No1 and No2 companies in March. For the former, the level of authorisation is 855 vehicles with 780 discs used, but 708 allocated for a peak vehicle requirement of 623. For No2, authorisation is for 550 vehicles with 385 discs issued and a PVR of 378. In both cases, the number of vehicles authorised has been reduced to the number of discs actually issued, with immediate effect. Although this will have no material effect on what is operated at present, it means that if either operator is called to another public inquiry again, any adverse findings that lead to a further variation in authorisation might cut into the actual operation.

Garelochhead Coaches
Ford M16-bodied Ford Transit GN55 XTD was new in February and Plaxton Beaver 2-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D SA02 LFF passed to Thomson, Glasgow in March.

Gibson, Renfrew
Several of the recently delivered Optare Solos were noted in use for a few days in early March, but appear to have been withdrawn until the start of new service 21A (Paisley-Govan Cross) in April. They are in a revised livery with the dark blue swept up towards the rear of the bus. Former Canavan, Kilsyth Dennis/Plaxton Mini Pointer Dart S581 PGB has also been painted in this style.

Glenesk, Edzell
Deansgate-bodied Renault Master P570 FRJ was sold in January.

Goosecroft, Denny
Denny circular service 172 was cancelled from 25 April, but half-hourly weekday service GC1 (Denny/Larbert/Camelon/Falkirk) is due to start on 1 May.

Gulliver's Travels, Langbank
From 12 June, new weekday service 21/24 (Neilston-Govan bus station via Paisley town centre and Braehead shopping centre) is to operate every 20min.

Harte, Greenock
Plaxton Paramount-bodied Volvo B10M-61 D22 EFS (*HIL 5347, D22 EFS*) had passed to M-Line, Alloa by March.

Highland Country RN
East Lancs-bodied Volvo B10M-61 176 (KXI 424, *B858 XYR*) was given back its original registration around August last year. ECW-bodied Leyland Olympians 323 (NIL 2734, *A260 YEP, A12 MTL, A507 GPC*), 324 (NIL 2735, *B693 BPU*) were re-registered A260 YEP and B693 BPU respectively towards the end of the year, before passing to Redby, Hendon in January.

Highland Heritage, Dalmally
Van Hool C59F-bodied Volvo B12BTs SN06 ACO/U were new in March. They are named *Clan MacQuarrie/Chieftain Lachlan* and *Clan MacMillan/Chieftain Knapdale* respectively.

Hutchison, Overtown
Irizar Century-bodied Scania K114IB4 SK02 ZYJ has been given David Urquhart Travel lettering in lieu of Caledonian Travel names.

Irvine, Law
A new Bova Futura FHD13-340 was due to be delivered around April.

Irvine, Salsburgh
Former Park, Hamilton Jonckheere C53F-bodied Volvo B12M SG03 ZER (*2 WR*) was acquired in February.

Jay, Greengairs
ECW H45/32F-bodied Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1R AEF 223Y and similar Alexander-bodied YSO 40Y were purchased last August, ex-Allander, Milngavie AT70, 66 respectively.

Key, Johnstone
The Braehead Works, Renfrew operating centre has been replaced by one at Caledonian House, Carnegie Road, Hillington Industrial Estate.

Lochs & Glens, Aberfoyle
FJ06 BSV is one of five 13.75m Jonckheere Mistral 70-bodied Volvo B12B tri-axle coaches new in March. Their delivery completes a three-year programme to replace the company's 15-vehicle fleet with longer Volvos.

Lothian LB
After a spell of inactivity, conversion of Plaxton President-bodied Dennis Tridents to single-door configuration have started again, with 551 noted in March and 578 being converted then. Leyland Olympian 344 and Volvo Olympian 433 have lost their Egg Finance advertising treatments in favour of madder and white.

From 26 March, some journeys on Ingliston Park-&-Ride service X48 were extended to Ratho to replace Mac Tours service 67, and some weekday peak hour journeys run into the Royal Bank of Scotland headquarters at Gogarburn to replace service 12 at that locus.

Fare changes implemented from 26 March included reducing the number of single adult cash fares to one, at £1. This completes conversion of single fares from six bands in 1999 to the new flat fare arrangement; child single cash fares had already been standardised at 60p.

Other than Airlink 100, no services were operated on 28 March owing to a one-day strike in connection with proposed changes to the local authorities pension scheme.

MacEwan, Amisfield
UVG CitiStar-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814Ds R27/8 USM passed to Staff Pay, Chatham in November.

McGill, Greenock
It is reported that two Mercedes-Benz Citaros are due for imminent delivery, with another four due next year, and four more in 2008.

Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-62s acquired in February comprise C53F-bodied T401 JSL (*T77 JDS*) ex-Midland, Auchterarder and C51Ft-bodied W600 SOU ex-Southern, Barrhead.

An unidentified Optare Tempo demonstrator was tried on the Largs service for a few days from 13 March.

McKindless, Wishaw
R179 VLA, another Plaxton Pointer 2 B35F-bodied Dennis Dart SLF, joined this fleet in March, ex-Metroline Travel DL79. Berkhof-bodied Dennis Lances WIL 9209/10/2/3/9/21 (*M965/4/3/59/60/2 SDP*) passed to Servisair, Dublin in March.

McLeod, Rogart
Further to last July's issue, the wheelchair accessible Plaxton Beaver 2-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D delivered last May is registered SY05 DRX, and was the first example of its type to be built.

Mac Tours, Edinburgh LB
Alexander-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 29 (G665 PHH, *XIL 1485, G665 PHH*) was sold to Houston, Bathgate in January.

Mathieson, Inverness
Former Mayne, Buckie Berkhof C51Ft-bodied Volvo B10M-62s X444 GSM and GM02 GSM were acquired in February; X444 GSM was immediately re-registered B5 YST and named *Amy*.

Similar Van Hool-bodied B2 YST (*YST 738, M680 KVU*) was re-registered M959 XST before being sold to Moseley (dealer), Glenmavis together with Plaxton-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D YN05 HVO.

Mayne, Buckie
As noted above, Berkhof-bodied Volvo B10M-62s X444 GSM and GM02 GSM passed to Mathieson, Inverness in February.

MCT, Motherwell
Former Park, Hamilton Jonckheere C53F-bodied Volvo B12M SJ04 HSG (*12 HM, LSK 509*) joined this fleet in December.

Meffan, Kirriemuir ST
1979 Plaxton Supreme-bodied AEC Reliance coach 59611 (EPM 137V) was sold for preservation in February. Its new owner, a Taybus Vintage Vehicle Society member, plans to restore it to its original Green Line livery.

Meteor, Edinburgh Airport GA
Following the loss of the main hire car/car park shuttle service at Edinburgh Airport last December, the operator licence held by this company was given up in February.

Midland, Auchterarder
Further to last month's issue, the Sitcar Beluga 2 C29F-bodied Mercedes-Benz O815D purchased last August entered service in March as SP06 DGE. Irizar PB C49Ft-bodied Scania K124EB SP06 DGF and Van Hool Alizée C49Ft-bodied Volvo B12M SP06 DFZ also entered service in March.

Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-62 T401 JSL (*T77 JDS*) and Plaxton-bodied Volvo B7R SR02 JMV (*4488 WD, Y77 JDS*) have been sold as a result of the new arrivals.

Mitchell, Plean
Having been the first Scottish operator to take a TransBus Enviro300, this firm is the first Scottish

Right: The first two Plaxton Primos in Scotland are with Munro's of Jedburgh, which uses them on new Midlothian Council routes connecting Levenhall, Musselburgh with Dalkeith Campus and Cousland. This is 401 (MX55 WDS), the first of the pair, in Craigmillar Road, Edinburgh.
RICHARD WALTER

operator with an Irisbus Agora Line in its fleet; new example SN06 AFK entered service in mid-March.

Northern Counties-bodied Leyland Olympian ONLXB/1R B88 BUS (*B125 TVU*) was given back its original registration in December before being sold to Grant Palmer, Dunstable. UVG-bodied Dennis Javelin P782 WOS also left the fleet by January.

M-Line, Alloa

Ford M14-bodied Ford Transit SH03 XBE was being used by February and Plaxton Paramount C53F-bodied Volvo B10M-61 D22 EFS (*HIL 5347*, *D22 EFS*) had joined the fleet by March ex-Harte, Greenock.

Moffat & Williamson, St Fort

B25F-seated Optare Solo M880s MX06 ACZ, ADO arrived in March for use on the Glenrothes local services. They have discreet branding for Route 5, and Sestrans funding acknowledgments on the rear.

Plaxton-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D BSK 791 (*R650 XAW*) and Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10M-62 FSU 371 (*R153 SSN*) regained their original registrations by March, allowing Wadham Stringer-bodied Dennis Javelin 12SDAs M802/14 ASL (*EC 46 AA*, *EC 50 AA*) to become BSK 791 and FSU 371 respectively.

Plaxton Beaver-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814Ds SP04 FKM/N, ousted by the new Solos mentioned above, were sold by March.

Morrow, Glasgow

The three former Stagecoach North West Alexander PS-bodied Volvo B10M-55s damaged in the Carlisle floods in January 2005 were all sold in March. K719/32 DAO were taken by DJ International, Barrhead and K773 DAO passed to Lloyd, Machynlleth.

Munro, Jedburgh

Van Hool Alizée-bodied DAF SB3000s 235 (K235 AHG, *1606 UK*, *K517 RJX*) and 515 (K515 RJX, *JAZ 6795*, *K515 RJX*) were acquired last September ex-Tyrer, Nelson and Palmer, Normanton respectively. Two further arrivals in March for use on the new local service network were Optare Solo M920s 304/5 (MX05 OTP, MX54 KXO); they were expected to be followed by some new MAN buses.

Park, Hamilton

Van Hool CH57/14Ct-bodied Volvo B12(T) coaches LSK 499, 511/2 (*R264 OFJ*, *P926/7 KYC*) were transferred to this fleet in February from Trathens, Plymouth.

Jonckheere-bodied Volvo B12M 12 HM (*LSK 509*) was re-registered SJ04 HSG in December when it passed to MCT, Motherwell. Similar SA02 UCE (*HSK 642*), SN02 NGS (*LSK 839*) and SG03 ZER (*2 WR*) have been acquired by Heyfordian, Bicester; Thomas, Harrow Weald; and Irvine, Salsburgh respectively.

Paterson, Kilbirnie

This company ceased to trade at the end of February following the proprietor's retirement.

PJ Travel, Clydebank

A fire on 28 February at the Auld Street, Dalmuir premises used by this company is reported to have resulted in the loss of 11 vehicles.

Prentice, West Calder

Recent acquisitions comprise Plaxton C53F-bodied Volvo B10M-62 M308 BAV ex-Dalybus, Standish in January and Plaxton C70F-bodied Volvo B7Rs SJ53 CUU/V ex-Pride of the Clyde, Port Glasgow in February. M308 BAV was re-seated C57F when it arrived.

Bova Futura FHD12-340 SF03 AXJ was re-registered 36 RP in February.

Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-61 LUI 7857 (*NGH 456*) passed to Blyth, Leven last November.

Pride of the Clyde, Greenock

As noted above, Plaxton-bodied Volvo B7Rs SJ53 CUU/V passed to Prentice, West Calder in February.

Rapson, Tain

1980 Alexander Y-bodied Seddon Pennine VII DSD 983V, originally Western SMT S2983, had left this fleet by March for preservation at Bus World, Hillington.

Royal Mail

Services 49 (Lockerbie-Corrie) and 50 (Lockerbie-Hightae) are being cancelled from 3 June, with 211 (Aberfeldy-Glenlyon/Lubreoch) and 222 (Pitlochry-Dalnaspidal) finishing a week later.

Above: T403 EGD, one of the two Alexander ALX300-bodied Volvo B10BLEs that Slaemuir Coaches has acquired from Irish operator J. J. Kavanagh for service X7 (Glasgow-Kilmacolm), a route given up by First Glasgow, which took it over following the collapse of Dart Buses. PHIL HALEWOOD

Scotbus, Inverness

Service 30 (Inverness, Union Street-North Kessock, Old Pier) was cancelled from 21 April.

Scottish Citylink DG

Stagecoach Glasgow Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10M-62 52465 (R85 SEF) has taken on the duty of carrying the 'nominal' Scottish Citylink disc and legal lettering. Six discs are allocated but it is understood that only one is normally in use. The legal address is given as Sandgate, Ayr, reflecting that Stagecoach has taken over the day-to-day management of this company, but the coach remains in the Stagecoach Glasgow fleet. Until the recent change in control of the company, the disc was allocated to a Ford Transit of West Coast Motors.

Slaemuir, Greenock

Alexander ALX300-bodied Volvo B10BLE T403/4 EGD have been acquired ex-J. J. Kavanagh, Urlingford for use on service X7. T403 EGD (*99 KE 111*) arrived in February Both entered service in March in full fleet livery with route branding.

Southern, Barrhead

Van Hool Alizée T9 C51F-bodied Volvo B12B SO06 SOU was new in March. Similar Volvo B10M-62s Y800 SOU and W600 SOU were acquired by Wilson, Rhu and McGill, Greenock in January and February respectively.

Stagecoach Bluebird ST

Plaxton Profile C51FL-bodied Volvo B7Rs 53236/40/2/4/5 (SV55 FKM/O/U/Y/Z) were new in January.

Jonckheere Monaco-bodied MAN 24.350 50040 has been repainted into blue Megabus.com livery.

Vehicles that left the fleet around February comprised Leyland Titan TNLXB2RRs 10246. 10562/71/93, 10615/22, 10825, 10996, 11084 (EYE 246V, NUW 562/71/93, 615/22Y, A825 SUL, A996 SYE, B84 WUV); Northern Counties-bodied Leyland Olympians 13022, 13173 (A22 HNC, C173 YBA); Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50 15269 (C807 USG); Duple 300-bodied Volvo B10M-56 20597 (WLT 774, *E158 XHS*); Plaxton Derwent-bodied Volvo B10M-55 20599 (WLT 439, *G569 ESD*); Alexander Dash-bodied Volvo B6-50 30267 (L267 CCK); Alexander-bodied Dennis Dart SLF 34023 (R123 VPU); Alexander Sprint-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 40277 (G277 TSL); similar Alexander (Belfast)-bodied 40052/89 (P352 ASO, K489 FFS); and Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10M-62 52272 (147 YFM, *M912 WJK*).

Stagecoach Fife ST

Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10M-62 52308 (N618 USS) was re-registered GSU 341 around February.

Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50 15274 (C804 USG) was not transferred to Stagecoach Glasgow in October, but returned to this fleet after a short period on loan.

Alexander-bodied Leyland Olympian 14723 (K723 ASC) was deroofed in Kirkcaldy in March.

Alexander-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50 15292 (C792 USG) and Alexander (Belfast)-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 40074 (M774 TFS) were donated to charity in February. Similar 709D 40080 (M780 TFS) was scrapped then, together with Carlyle Dartline-bodied Dennis Dart 8.5SDLs 32342/6 (H162 NON, H146 MOB). Alexander (Belfast)-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709D 40091 (K491 FFS) and Alexander Dash B40F-bodied Volvo B6-50s 30659/70-2 (L659 HKS, M670-2 SSX) were reported with Barrhead Bus Company in March.

From 25 April, this company is increasing the frequency of service 23 (St. Andrews-Stirling) and extending service 78 (Dunfermline-High Valleyfield) to Stirling to replace journeys being withdrawn then by First Edinburgh — ending the joint provision of St Andrews-Stirling and Dunfermline-Stirling services.

Stagecoach Glasgow ST

Jonckheere Monaco-bodied MAN 24.350s 50041/5 were repainted into Scottish Citylink livery in February and March respectively.

New Monday to Saturday service X15 (Glasgow, Buchanan bus station-Ardrossan, Harbour) is due to start on 15 May.

Stagecoach Western ST

22383/7-9 (SF55 RKJ, VUN-P), further Alexander ALX300 B42F-bodied MAN 18.220HOCLs, arrived by February. The recent delivery of these buses has been shared between Ayr (22384-90) and Dumfries (22379/82/3) depots, with 22380/1 unallocated at the time of writing.

B70F-seated Alexander Dennis Enviro300 schoolbus demonstrator SN55 HSF was on loan for a few days around 23 February and operated on school contracts from Dumfries and Kilmarnock depots.

Alexander-bodied Volvo Olympian 16864 (N864 NHH), deroofed in November 2004, is being converted to partial open-top as time permits.

Alexander PS-bodied Volvo B10M-55s 20145/52 (R645 LSO, R652 VSE) were transferred to Stagecoach Merseyside in January, and Alexander Y-bodied Leyland Leopard PSU3E/4R 25797 (BSJ 917T) was sold by March.

Stepend, Glenmavis

By March, Alexander-bodied Mercedes-Benz L887 SDY was repainted into fleet colours ex-Stagecoach livery.

Strathtay ST

East Lancs-bodied Leyland Tiger TRCTL11/3R 25818 [430] and Northern Counties-bodied Dennis Dart 9.8SDL 32907 [309] have been repainted into Stagecoach corporate livery.

continued overleaf...

Operation of Sainsbury's Monday to Saturday Broughty Ferry-Whitfield superstore service 88 starts on 5 May; it was previously provided by Travel Dundee.

Wright Handybus-bodied Dennis Dart 9.8SDL 32476 [301] (K301 MSN) was sold to RGC Recyclers (dealer), Dundee in January, followed by the remains of Alexander-bodied MCW Metrobus 15888 [809] (D309 DSR) in February. Alexander-bodied Metrobus DR102/47 808 (B97 PKS) was sold for preservation in March.

Stuart, Carluke

Alexander H47/33F-bodied Volvo Citybus B10M-50 F103 TML joined this fleet by March, ex-EVE Coaches, Dunbar.

Thomson, Glasgow

Plaxton Beaver 2 B31F-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D SA02 LFF was acquired from Garelochhead Minibuses & Coaches in March and has been repainted into the allover yellow livery for use on the Airbus Express service.

Toolan, Glenrothes

This firm has become the first UK operator to take delivery of a Chinese-built coach, a C47Ft-seated King Long 6127. It is to be made available for inspection at Euro Bus Expo at the National Exhibition Centre from 7-9 November.

Travel Dundee NX

Wright Axcess-ultralow-bodied Scania L94UB 66 and Wright Liberator-bodied Volvo B10L 123 have been given the revised livery with deeper blue skirt extending up to window level, the Fintry Shuttle 32/33 branding remaining on 123.

Plaxton Paramount 3200-bodied Volvo B10M-56 251 [TC16] (NSV 616, *OES 343Y*) passed to Hilton, Newton-le-Willows in January, followed by Plaxton Expressliner-bodied Volvo B10M-60s 258 [TC21] (K682 NES, *6689 DP, K660 BOH, K4 CEN*) and 261 [TC24] (K658 BOH, *AJX 158, K658 BOH, K2 CEN*) in February. East Lancs-bodied Scania N113CRBs 110/1 (K410/1 MSL) were transferred to Travel West Midlands in March.

Service withdrawals from 1 May comprise 4A (City Centre-Camperdown Leisure Park), which is being replaced by revised services 3, 4 on Mondays to Saturdays, and 4B on Sundays; 31 (City Quay-Trottick), owing to poor patronage; and the Sainsbury Claypotts superstore service 88 (Broughty Ferry-Whitfield), which is being replaced by Strathtay.

Victoria, Peterhead

Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-60 MIL 2430 (*K992 OHS*) was re-registered NIW 1422 in December.

Watermill, Fraserburgh

Van Hool C49Ft-bodied Volvo B10M-55 Y288 RSO was acquired in March ex-Whyte, Newmachar.

Waverley, Edinburgh

Monday to Saturday service 67 (Ratho-Chesser Avenue, Asda superstore via Gogar station, Sighthill, Westside Plaza and Longstone) was registered from 27 March.

West Coast, Campbeltown

SF06 HFN, a new Alexander Dennis Mini Pointer Dart, was allocated to Oban depot in March for use on the enhanced Oban, Glengallan Road-Dunbeg service, funded by Bus Route Development Grant.

1981 Alexander Y B53F-bodied Leyland Leopard PSU3G/4R CSF 159W and similar PSU3F/4R CSF 167W were purchased from Docherty, Irvine in March. Although the original intention was to use them for spares, it is understood that at least one is likely to enter service.

The conversion of Leyland-bodied Leyland Titan TNLXB2RR GYE 273W to open-top configuration was nearing completion in March.

Whitelaw, Stonehouse

Marcopolo Viale Citybus B42F-bodied MAN 18.220 demonstrator PL05 TCO was with this company during March and an unidentified Plaxton Primo demonstrator was noted on service 201 on 6 March.

Whyte, Newmachar

New C49Ft-seated Bova Futura FHD12-340s SV06 CEJ/K/N/O entered service in March.

Van Hool Alizée T9-bodied Volvo B12B SN05 FLP was acquired by Brown, Broxburn in February and Van Hool-bodied Volvo B10M-55 Y288 RSO passed to Watermill, Fraserburgh in March.

Wilson, Gourock

The Inverclyde Tour mentioned last month is numbered 27 and due to start on 7 May.

Wilson, Rhu

Van Hool Alizée C51F-bodied Volvo B10M-62 Y800 SOU joined this fleet in January ex-Southern, Barrhead and was immediately re-registered 641 RHU. Similar 641 RHU (*N497 PYS, LSK 830*) reverted to N497 PYS then before being sold to Plaxton (dealer), Anston.

Optare Solo M950 YJ06 FJL arrived in March in allover white for use on the new Vale of Leven Hospital-Paisley Royal Alexandra Hospital service, for which branding will be applied later.

Optare Tempo X1060 demonstrator YJ05 JWZ appeared for a brief visit in March.

Wishart, Friockheim NX

Plaxton Paramount 3500-bodied Volvo B10M-60s W249 (H856 AHS, *A9 TPT, H856 AHS*), W311 (VSR 591, *G804 BPG*) and Reeve Burgess-bodied Mercedes-Benz 814D W302 (H290 WSE, *PSR 781, H290 WSE*) were sold to Hilton, Newton-le-Willows earlier this year.

Woods, Tillicoultry

KVC-bodied Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 413Cdi SL52 CPE passed to Bryans, Denny last November, while Van Hool Alizée-bodied Volvo B10M-62 N799 EES (*N77 JDS*) and Plaxton-bodied Mercedes-Benz Vario O814D SF54 CJO were sold to Moseley (dealer), Glenmavis in January.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

M. Allan, D. Ansell, D. Booth, C. Carberry, N. Cram, M. Currie, First Glasgow, P. Halewood, T. Hamilton, Lothian Buses, D. McGeachan, E. McSheffrey, Midland Coaches, John Morrow Coaches, G. Munro, B. Nicol, S. Oliver, Stagecoach Bluebird, Stagecoach Glasgow, PSV Circle, Stagecoach Western, renfrewshirebus@yahoogroups.com, R. Walter, Taybus Vintage Vehicle Society, scotlandbus@yahoogroups.com, sescotbus@yahoogroups.com have contributed news items this month. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

FLEET IN FOCUS

FLEET:	Hunter's Coaches
BASED:	Oakfield Garage, Loanhead, Midlothian
FOUNDED:	1880, when William Hunter started using horse-drawn carriages to transport coal around the mining villages of Midlothian, but provided horses and traps for outings and weddings at the weekends. The first motor vehicles and charabancs arrived in the 1920s, and by the 1950s goods transport had been given up to concentrate on the passenger side of the business. The company later traded as W. R. & G. Hunter (Coaches) Ltd and is currently run by cousins Ian and William Hunter.
WHERE DOES IT OPERATE?:	Concentrates on hires and tours, both in the UK and throughout Europe.
LIVERY:	No set livery until the mid-1930s, when the Duple show colours of rich cream and brown were adopted. These have been used since then, complete with a red-coated huntsman logo. Two notable exceptions are Van Hool-bodied Volvos SRU 410 in blue and white for the Scotland rugby team (the firm has driven the team since 1967), and RRY 342 in allover black with white lettering for the Edinburgh Rugby Club.
HOW MANY VEHICLES?:	The licence allows for operation of 15 vehicles, and 14 are owned at present.
MOST INTERESTING VEHICLE?:	A varied fleet in the earlier years with a good mix of makes represented, both new and secondhand. The first recorded motorbus was S 6080, a Caledon charabanc bought new in 1916, but one of the most unusual 'oldies' for any Scottish fleet was SY 5900, a TSM New Express 4 with Duple coachwork bought after being exhibited at the 1935 Scottish Motor Show in the colours of another operator. Later, AEC, Daimler and Leyland coaches were operated, but the company then concentrated on Bedford (including Duple-bodied VAL LSY 477) and then Ford R1014 and R1114 models. Today, the choice is standardised on Volvo full-size coaches and Toyota Coaster midicoaches.

Right: Before being given its current cherished registration to honour its role on behalf of the Scottish Rugby Union, Van Hool-bodied Volvo SRU 410 was delivered as SN51 NFR. VOLVO

Where to send your Irish news reports

Reports on Northern Ireland operators, please, to:
G. Irvine Millar, 54 Castlemore Avenue, Belfast, BT6 9RG.

Reports on Irish Republic operators, please, to:
Ian Molloy, Willow Grove, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, Co Dublin,
or by e-mail to: **ntpa@eircom.net**.

MAJOR OPERATORS

Ulsterbus

B55F-seated BMC schoolbus BX55 OFR has arrived for demonstration at Ballymena with temporary fleetnumber 2031.

Delivery of the first of the Ayats Bravo double-deck Goldline coaches is understood to be imminent.

The last of the current batch of Leyland Tiger/Alexander Q-types transferred from Metro is 1465 (YXI 1465) at Newcastle. Two Q-types returned to service after a prolonged absence for repairs are accident damaged Tiger 1402 (WXI 1402) at Dungannon and (engine) fire-damaged Volvo B10M 1534 (DAZ 1534) at Great Victoria Street.

More Alexander-bodied Leyland Leopards delicensed and placed in reserve are 245/74/86 (WOI 2245, YOI 2274, GEZ 8109 *AXI 286*). Also stood down is Mercedes-Benz 711D/Alexander 899 (JAZ 3899). Leopard 333 (BXI 333) has been re-registered GEZ 8821.

Former Goldline Leyland Tiger/Alexander Q-type DP49F 1348 (TXI 1348) has been reseated as a service bus, apparently with seats from a withdrawn Leopard. Another former Goldline coach, Volvo B10M/Plaxton Premiere 1592 (EAZ 2592), has been repainted in bus livery, but has not yet been reseated.

Further Wright TS-bodied Mercedes-Benz 709Ds sold to operators across the border in Co. Donegal are 709D 845 (NXI 6845) with McLaughlin, Convoy and 888 (GEZ 4648, *AAZ 8888*) with McGonagle, Buncrana. Leopard/Alexander 249 (WOI 2249) has gone to McDaid, Londonderry for scrap, while similar 147 (HEZ 1012, *ROI 147*) has gone to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. There is some doubt about the fate of the Leopards reported last month as offered for auction; they may still be on Ulsterbus's hands.

Metro

Dennis Dart SLF/Wright Crusader 642 (LAZ 7642), which has a long-standing engine problem, and DAF SBR2300/Van Hool Astrobel double-deck coach 2000 (UXI 2000, *E655 KCX*) have been delicensed. The Astrobel, new in 1988, has seen limited use since it was purchased 15 years ago and is likely to be sold. It is hard to believe that a 1997 Dart is life expired in a group still running 22-year-old Leopards.

Leyland Tiger/Alexander Q-type 1472 (YXI 1472), which carries an overall advertisement for Heinz Baked Beans, has had its front panels repainted from Citybus red and ivory to Metro magenta and white. This may herald a change of policy as, apart from the two Volvos transferred for last year's Metro launch, no high-floor vehicles were to be presented in Metro livery.

Similar Tiger 1465 (YXI 1465) has been transferred to Ulsterbus.

Flexibus

Mercedes-Benz 709D/Wright TS 830 (NXI 6830) and similarly bodied 811D 1807 (SXI 2807) have been sold to McLaughlin, Convoy, Co. Donegal.

Dublin Bus

A further 100 Alexander Dennis ALX400-bodied Volvo B7TLs (AX.549-648) have been ordered for late-autumn delivery. If the government sanctions fleet expansion plans in the Transport 21 initiative by 200 buses, these buses and similar AX449-548 — which were being bodied in March — could take fleet strength up to 1,283. Alternatively, all remaining RH-class Leyland Olympians and most RA-class Volvo Olympians could be withdrawn. Fifty of the new AXs will be stored ready for first use on a high-frequency shuttle service when Ireland hosts the Ryder Cup golf tournament at the K Club course near Naas, Co. Kildare, approximately 20 miles from Dublin city centre.

Two vehicles inspected in late-March, but not used in service, were new Stagecoach Lincolnshire Volvo B7TL/Wright Eclipse Gemini 16943 (SN06 AOE) and London General Alexander Dennis Enviro400 SN06 BNA, numbered E1 in that fleet.

Further to Fleet News last month, new articulated bus route 4 (St Vincent's Hospital, Merrion-Ballymun) began on **12** March. Volvo Olympians RV550-68 returned to service the following day, taking active fleet strength up to 1,083 buses and helping increase frequencies on Swords area routes 41/A/B/C and 43. Swords is one of the fastest growing towns in Greater Dublin.

Ensignbus, Purfleet (dealer) has collected almost all of the 1991/92 Leyland Olympians that it recently purchased.

VL4 is the first of four of the Alexander Ultra-bodied Volvo B10Ls repainted into the yellow/navy livery; the fifth (either VL1 or VL5) will be withdrawn for conversion into a mobile display unit. The new livery has reached a landmark with Volvo Olympians RV414-6 repainted for a second time — two years after they first donned these then new colours. With the conversion of all Harristown buses to the system in late-March, the entire fleet has been equipped with Wayfarer TGX150 ticket machines.

Bus Éireann

Further new CIÉ Tours-liveried Irizar PB-bodied Scania K-series coaches delivered are SP31/3/4/6/9, 40-3/5 (06 D 20995, 27981/2, 22754, 20997/6, 22825, 27984/3, 31512/491). First noted in service is SP41. In anticipation of their receipt at Cork, Capwell garage borrowed SP9 from CIÉ Tours work at Limerick for driver familiarisation.

Former Dunn-Line Scania/Irizar Century coaches at Broadstone pending schools allocations are SI101-9 (02 D 81205/7, 01 D 91723, 02 D 81209-3, 01 D 91724); their former UK registrations are not yet available.

Caetano Algarve-bodied Volvo B10M VC12 (94 D 23655) is understood to be an almost certain and significant withdrawal at Cork. It sustained engine fire damage, but its body remains intact. Also at Cork, Fiat Ducato/Parfit 12-seat schools minibus FS2 (97 C 8672) is officially withdrawn, having been off service for at least 18 months.

Prominent route branding for high-profile service 20 (Dublin-Galway) has been applied to Sunsundegui-bodied Volvos VG12-20.Volvo/Sunsundeguis on services 871/873 to/from Ireland.

OTHER OPERATORS

Ards Tours (Bell), Newtownards

This operator has acquired ECW-bodied Leyland Olympian B968 WRN from Lavelle, Belfast (originally a Ribble vehicle), and Northern Counties coach-seated Leyland Olympian D264 JVR ex First. Dennis Dominator B107 UAT has been sold to Rooney, Hilltown, where is has displaced a Leyland Titan CUL 71V, also ex-Ards Tours.

Barton, Maynooth

Besides the Polish-built Autosan reported and illustrated last month, recent deliveries to this operator DAF-powered, Turkish-built Temsa Safari HD 05 KE 5670, Marcopolo-bodied VDL SB4000 06 KE 4888, Plaxton-bodied Irisbus EuroRider 06 KE 4854 and Berkhof Axial-bodied coaches 05 KE 6738, 06 KE 5036/7.

Citylink, Galway

Three new Irizar PB-bodied Scania K-series coaches are 06 G 308, 4440/1.

Coach Approach, Belfast

Mercedes-Benz Vario/Plaxton Cheetah SF05 FNR is reported with this operator.

Collins, Carrickmacross

A new Van Hool Alizée-bodied coach is 06 MN 1158.

Dualway (McConn), Rathcoole

New coaches here are 06 D 1619, a Mercedes-Benz/Indcar Wing, 06 D 13357, a Mercedes-Benz/Unvi Cimo, and Marcopolo-bodied VDL SB4000 06 D 21167.

Bernard Kavanagh, Urlingford

06 KK 722 is a new Jonckheere-bodied coach (Volvo?) in Eurolines livery for service 890 (Cork-Waterford-London).

Lavelle, Belfast

Dennis Dart SLF/Plaxton Pointer 2 SN53 LWR has been delivered, possibly for a new local bus service planned for the inner suburbs. Lavelle also runs the Belfast City Sightseeing tour with a collection of open and closed-top double-deckers, including a Routemaster in Belfast Corporation colours.

Malahide Coaches

06 D 27960 is a new Irizar Intercentury-bodied Scania.

Manning, Croom, Co. Limerick

06 LK 3165 is possibly the first Irish example of a Beulas Cygnus-bodied Irisbus EuroRider.

McCormack, Ferbane

In addition to former-Bus Éireann Van Hool T815A Acron C53F SI 2033 (ex-CVH33), this operator also has former Dublin Bus Mercedes-Benz 811D/Wright NimBus B29F 90 D 5005 (ex-MW5), which began life as a 16-seat coach.

Morton, Rathfarnham

A new East Lancs-bodied Volvo B7TL is 06 D 22209.

P&O Irish Ferries

Three Leyland National Greenways have replaced the ex-Citybus Bristol RELL6Gs here.

Two have been identified as former London General GLS468/9 (GUW 468/9W) of which the latter carries 'registration' CC 2514. Being confined to private property within the port security area makes close examination difficult.

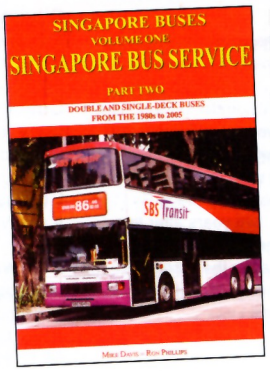
Below: The first right-hand-drive Volvo 9700 Prestige coaches — Polish-built on B12B running units — have entered service with Callinan of Claregalway, which has been using 06 G 604 on hire to Bus Éireann. DARREN HALL

Most books and videos reviewed are available from the Ian Allan Bookshops: LONDON 45/6 Lower Marsh, Waterloo, London SE1 7RG Tel: 020 7401 2100 • MANCHESTER 5 Piccadilly Station Approach, Manchester M1 2GH Tel: 0161 237 9840 • CARDIFF 31 Royal Arcade, Cardiff CF10 1AE Tel: 02920 390 615 • BIRMINGHAM 47 Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4DH Tel: 0121 643 2496 • BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT The Aviation Experience, 3rd Floor, Main Terminal, Birmingham Int'l Airport B26 3QJ Tel: 0121 781 0921 • Contact by email: ianallanbookshop@talk21.com • Or online: www.ianallansuperstore.com • Mail Order enquiries: Midland Counties Publications, 4 Watling Drive, Hinckley, Leics LE10 3EY Tel: 01455 233 747 midlandbooks@compuserve.com

BOOKS

SINGAPORE BUSES VOLUME ONE; SINGAPORE BUS SERVICE PART TWO

MIKE DAVIS & RON PHILLIPS, DTS PUBLISHING, ISBN 1-900-51526-1, 300mm x 210mm, 109pp. SOFTBACK, £24.95



To recap, DTS is publishing a series of books telling the story of Singapore's public transport. There is a definitive history, *Singapore – A History of its Trams, Trolleybuses and Buses* of which Volume 1 was published in 1996 and Volume 2 is due out soon. For various reasons, that continuation of the history, unlike Volume 1, will not have detailed vehicle information: such data is appearing in a series of illustrated fleetlists, of which this book is the second. It documents the vehicles bought by Singapore Bus Service between the late 1970s and 2005.

It is a measure of this book's success that one finds the odd error. So much information is crammed into every page that the response from non-aficionados could be to switch off completely. But so well is the data presented, with many first class colour photos, that one absorbs every word and gets so engaged that, occasionally, one starts to query something. Some are just the inevitable typos in so detailed a work and most of these are easy to translate. But some are not: was the Scania demonstrator Leicester 265 or 275?

Others are when what's written seems not to quite accord with the illustration. On p70, for instance, a logo on the window by the door does not appear to have been a feature from new. But see, it's that level of detail. Another example, less obvious to the general reader, is on the opposite page, where it is suggested that the photographer was playing cat and mouse with the bus as it inched along in heavy traffic. I don't think I was. I'm pretty certain it was a lazy shot of an interesting vehicle espied as I walked back to my employer's office, knackered by the heat and humidity after two hours wandering about.

I believe also that some bits of the airport bus and coach links story may be missing. At some point, possibly as a result of the move to the new airport at Changi in 1981, the original Mercedes coaches stopped serving the hotels individually, merely running to the slightly out of the way taxi rank at Newton Circus. The service may already have been in trouble but that killed it off. The new hotel service introduced in 1995, once again serving hotels, also didn't work. The relatively short distance from airport to city was always going to push the 'luxury' end of the market into taxis, I believe.

But as I said, the fact that I am making these quite detailed points means that I became thoroughly absorbed in this comprehensive description of the SBS fleet as it went from its pretty basic origins (have Part 1 nearby to remind you that a fair number of the old bangers illustrated therein were still going in the early years of this part) to its air-conditioned, three-axle sophistication of today. The vehicle variety decreases but there is still quite a range (Leylands, Volvos, Mercedes, Scanias plus a few other makes) and a much increased double-deck fleet. Detailed fleet lists accompany the type descriptions. This is a worthy addition to the interesting Singapore opus being assembled by DTS.

JULIAN OSBORNE

BUSES BEYOND BRITAIN

PAUL HAYWOOD, VENTURE PUBLICATIONS, ISBN 1 905304 08 0, 175mm x 240mm , 80pp , HARDBACK, £16.95

This latest in Venture's Colour Prestige series is the fruit of one globetrotting enthusiast's 30-plus years of discovering how interesting buses beyond our shores could be. Through a combination of holidays in pursuit of trams and business trips with a 35mm camera secreted in a briefcase, Paul Haywood seized the opportunity to photograph and learn something about the buses he encountered across several continents.

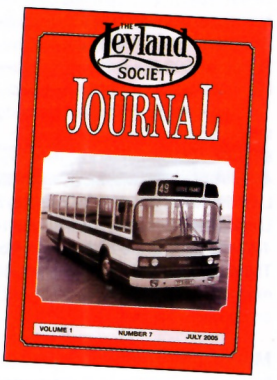
While the collection depicted inside is biased towards those with British interest — like the ex-West Riding Fleetline on the cover — it is arranged alphabetically by country, from Australia to the USA, and takes in some unashamedly indigenous products of manufacturers spread across the world. I've never visited Burma, but I can see why he fell for the ancient truck-derived buses he captured so atmospherically on visits there around 20 years ago.

If you prefer your buses to be more recognisable, you'll enjoy his views of Singapore, Hong Kong, Ireland, Lisbon or in Malta in the days when the island's buses were green. Whether your passion is for Routemasters, RTs and Lodekkas or GM Fishbowls and Comecon Ikarus 200s, they're all in here to savour.

ALAN MILLAR

LEYLAND SOCIETY JOURNAL No.7

Edited by MIKE SUTCLIFFE, No ISBN numbers, 300mm x 210mm, 48pp , SOFTBACK, Available to non-members for £6 from Mike Sutcliffe, Valley Forge, 213 Castle Hill Road, Totternhoe, Dunstable, Beds, LU6 2DA



The latest *Leyland Society Journal*, published last summer to mark the 70th anniversary of the manufacturer's much admired *Leyland Journal*, has a good mix of bus-related articles. Perhaps the most revealing is by David Burnicle who, as engineering director at Leyland Bus between 1977 and 1987, was one of the most important bus manufacturing people of his time.

From the inside, he lifts the lid on the development of such landmark vehicles as the Titan, Tiger, Olympian, National 2 and Lynx, showing the lengths Leyland went to in its attempt to eliminate windscreen reflections on the National 2 and Lynx. There is a picture of the real China Motor Bus Titan TC1 — a diecast scale model is reviewed on the opposite page — as well as a description of why the extra-long Titan number TB1 never made it to Hong Kong.

Another article looks at the brief flourishing of Premier Line, which operated commuter coaches into London in the early 1930s with some notable Leyland Tiger and Titan — yes, *single*-deck Titan — coaches and how many of these went on quickly to new lives with other operators.

ALAN MILLAR

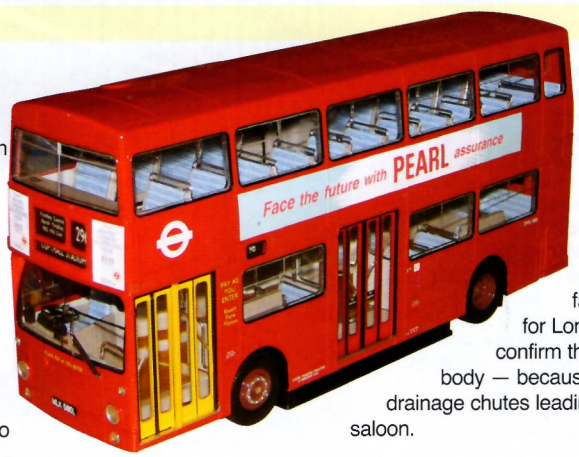
DIECAST MODELS

EFE 1:24 DAIMLER FLEETLINE WITH PARK ROYAL BODY

Guide Price £150

As soon as I opened March *Buses*, I was doomed. I saw Cheltenham Model Centre's advert for this 1:24 Fleetline and I was lost in nostalgia. I had to buy one. A quick phone call and a short wait later, a substantial box arrived containing pure treasure in the form of a securely packaged model in a cardboard box complete with carrying handle.

This is not going to be a detailed review because I do not want to split hairs over details that I am a bit hazy about; this is instead a wander down my (not very accurate) memory lane. After studying in London from 1969 to 1973, I was keen to stay there and a job vacancy for a mechanical engineer in London NW10 with British Leyland was too good to ignore. When I applied, I learned that it was at Park Royal Vehicles and my career in bus manufacturing began. During my interview visit, I saw the first Titan prototype (B15-01) in build and a factory half full of DMSs for London Transport. I can confirm that this model has a PRV body — because of the rectangular drainage chutes leading from the upper saloon.



The Fleetline had entered my life and my involvement became closer when LT at Chiswick asked for help with driver visibility — not least when reversing. My solution, which went into production, was to fit a plastic Fresnel lens in the rear lower saloon window (a flat wide angle lens, of the kind used by caravan drivers) and to sandwich it between two pieces of glass so it would say put. This made reversing in workshops safer, but visibility of the lower saloon and the area round the exit door required further attention to mirror placement.

The model itself is imposing and impressively heavy. Mostly of metal construction, it depicts DMS580, which was delivered in April 1973, only six months before I arrived. Rough measurements are 39cm long by 18cm high (I scaled it to 30ft 11in long, 14ft 2in high and 8ft 2.5in wide). The actual manufacture of the model is under the Drumwell banner, a brand already well known in the Hong Kong bus model world.

It has opening service doors (with a nice spring action to keep them open or shut — note that just the leading two leaves open in the front door — an opening upper saloon emergency door and engine cover (do retain the supplied lengths of plastic film to help you open them again) and revolving destination blinds (operated by small thumbwheels accessible through the doors) with a choice of destinations. I am reminded that on one PRV design we switched the upper saloon door from bottom hinged to top hinged because unwary vandals were being pulled out by the weight of the door, but I can't remember if that involved the DMS. The door on the model is top hinged.

The engine bay features a nice Gardner engine and air filter pack. If you are confident enough to invert the model, you can see a good level of chassis detail finished in black (I think some vehicles were painted silver underneath in reality) complete with front suspension and steering (although lock to lock is only about a quarter turn of the steering wheel) and a tidy reproduction of the complex rear axle (the Fleetline gearbox angle drive was at the fluid flywheel end of the box, so the propshaft was more or less on the vehicle centreline).

The interior is beautifully done although perhaps the seat moquette is a bit too blue but the Treadmaster floor covering looks spot on. The lettering and warning labels are just as I recall them.

Okay, I suppose I had better split some hairs now. As far as I can see, there is no radiator in the engine bay (the prototype used to overheat too), there is a lack of interior mirrors downstairs and also at the top of the periscope in the upper saloon and the famous 'STOP' flag device, which dropped in front of the driver in the event of loss of gearbox or brake air pressure, is missing. I also wonder if some of the stanchions should be wrapped in Doverite, a white plastic tape, rather than polished steel.

An Aftermarket colleague thinks the gearbox looks more like a Voith than the Wilson/Fleetline version of the Pneumocyclic, but who knows what test work might have been carried out in the vehicle's life. We did agree that DMS580 was not the vehicle fitted with a hydraulic pump and hydraulic wheel motors.

I feel churlish in making any criticisms when a manufacturer has made such a brave decision to proceed with a fantastic model of a bus that was to my view most unfairly maligned and unloved. EFE must be heartily congratulated. I am delighted with mine and I urge you to buy one. And, to remind me of more PRV adventures, can we have a Park Royal Titan next please?

ADRIAN WICKENS

P&T FOR CONCORDEHOBBY.COM 1: 76 CHINA MOTOR BUS LEYLAND TITAN TC1

Guide Price £35

It's not often that diecast models are made of a one-off vehicle, but China Motor Bus TC1 (CD 1213) is one of several that have appeared for that fleet. To be strictly accurate, this is a resin and white metal mix. TC1 was the only Titan exported new. It gave a good account of itself from 1979 until withdrawal in 1995 and spent much of its life on route 260 from Central to Stanley.

Concordehobby.com — which has produced just 400 of this model — is to be congratulated on the level of exterior detailing, for not only are all panel joints, lamps, flaps and grilles cast (rather than detailing by printing), individual rivets are even cast around the wheelarches. The rear registration plate is correctly inset, complete with cast lamp above it (picked out in silver). The fuel filler is neatly picked out in red, set against a black recess. However, the front is let down a little by headlamps being just recessed silver blobs. Rearview mirrors are accurately white, with blue arms and are silvered.

All window pans have raised, ribbed edges, neatly picked out in black, in scale, well representing window rubbers. The front indicator display is also edged in 'rubber', and appears 'behind glass', with the most realistic three-track numeral display (also on the rear) I've seen to date.

Internally, the vehicle is white with dark blue seating (and floor) and benefits from the lack of construction poles. Glazing is the one weak facet, having all window bars printed on. Inside the windows is a black safety rail all round, and I particularly like the periscope, clearly visible on the upper saloon front dash panel.

JOHN G. LIDSTONE

HONG KONG MODEL COMPANY 1:76 CHINA MOTOR BUS GUY ARAB LUF **Guide price £29**

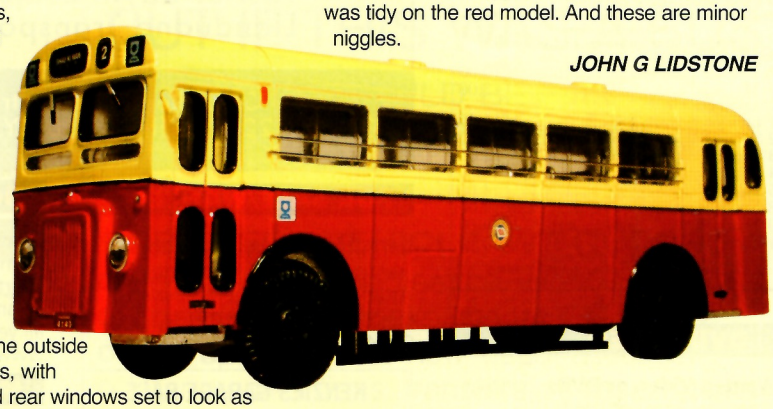
There are two versions of this handmade resin and metal model of the underfloor-engined Guy Arab LUF, a type not previously available in diecast form. One shows earlier dual-door plum and cream HK 4143 on route 2 to Shaukiwan, the other the later, single-door HK 4227 in red and cream, on route 1 to Happy Valley. Both are modelled in modified form, for additional front-mounted radiators, concealed behind Arab tin front grilles, supplemented their underfloor radiators.

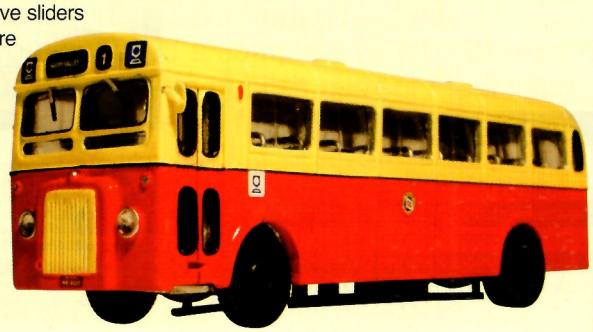
As ever with Hong Kong models, detailing is to a high standard. Thin scale twin safety rails are fitted to the outside of all side windows, with rearmost side and rear windows set to look as they are mounted in rubber. Others have sliders set directly into window pans. These are nicely captured, as are the RT-style rear trafficator arrows, which are cast rather than printed. Front and rear destination displays are shown behind glass and the headlamps are jewelled to avoid that painted silver blob look. Rearview mirrors are tiny, but extremely fragile.

Internally, separate seat-top handrails are a delight. The driver's cab contains a tiny, chunky steering wheel and the windscreens are spoilt by tiny, short windscreen wipers about half the length they should be. The registration plates are printed, but are too small on both models.

Being hand-built models, they all vary slightly. The entrance step assembly on my plum-coloured model sagged below door level, but it was tidy on the red model. And these are minor niggles.

JOHN G LIDSTONE





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1339. World of Double Deckers. Buses. Archive footage from around the world with several rarities, includes Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, Middle East.

1340. Crich. National Tramway Museum. Derbyshire. UK. A retro compendium with three visits to the Tramathon days in 1991, 1992 and 2002 now on DVD.

1341. Malta. Buses. 1998. A Retro Compendium with all the highlights of our trip with as many buses crammed in as we could, our first visit in post bus livery era.

1345. RM Finale. UK. Buses. London. The last full day of RMs 8th December 2005, film by John Bishop plus a look back to how RMs looked 10 years earlier.

1346. Sussex. UK. Buses. 2005. Lewes Bus Station, end of Stagecoach / Southdown era, Chichester in the summer and to finish Hastings on great winters day.

1347. Bus Marque. Leyland National. Buses. Starts with tour of Australian National operators then early days in UK , tour of Britain, artics, special uses etc.

1349. Granada/San Jose. Nicaragua/Costa Rico. January 2006. Perhaps the first ever coverage of buses in two little visited central American countries.

1350. Panama City / Panama Canal. Panama. January 2006. Buses / Shipping. Amazing night scenes of the Panama 'disco' buses and canal transit on Arcadia.

1354. Bus Spot - Cardiff Trolleybuses. UK. Trolleybuses. 1960s. All the best scenes carefully selected from the PMP archive with natural authentic sound added.

1355. Bus Spot – Maidstone. UK. Buses /Trolleybuses. An exquisite review of the former Kent municipal operator from trolleys and half cabs plus plenty of M&D.

1356. Birmingham.UK.Buses.February 2006. Our long outstanding visit to the heart of the Midlands , friendly crews as usual , plenty of bus activity.

1357. Best Ever Brighton. UK. Buses and Trolleys. 1960s-80s. The outstanding film by John Bishop featuring the erstwhile much missed municipal operator.

1358. Nottingham.UK.Buses & Trams. Feb 2006. A chance to catch up with the very modern Scania orientated Nottingham fleet bus fleet and a few tram shots.

1359. Bus Marque. The Lodekka Family. UK.Buses. A look at this distinctive bus which dominated the Tilling fleets from the 1950s to 70s scenes all over the UK.

1360. North Lincs. UK. Buses. Feb 2006. A sunny day at Scunthorpe and Grimsby, Road Car still not showing signs of Stagecoach ownership, lots of new stock.

1363. Sheffield. UK. Buses / Trams. February 2006. A very cold winters day, no sign of livery change on Terrier but last East Midlands Olympian on service.

1364. Derbyshire. UK. Buses. February 2006. Derby with bus station closure and traffic chaos plus Chesterfield and interesting independent scenes.

1365. Dublin.Ireland. Buses. All the latest including new three axles Enviros in bright sunshine, a great update in a hectic bus scene.

1366. Manchester. UK. Buses. March 2006. The new Shudehill interchange, Piccadilly and Wilmslow Rd, lots of GM Buses incls those in LT red.

1367. Bus Spot Stockport. The usual format including archives of NWRCC, SELNEC, GMPTE video from 1989-2005.

1368. Malta. Buses. March 2006. Something old , something new , our theme for this Saturday visit with good coverage of the wide range of buses.

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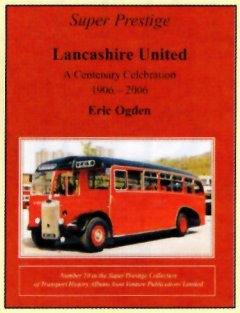

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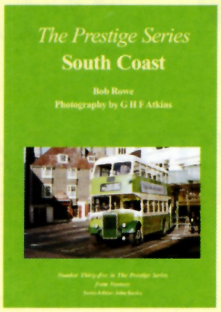

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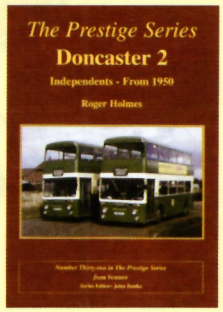

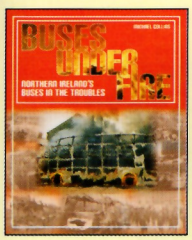

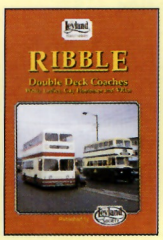

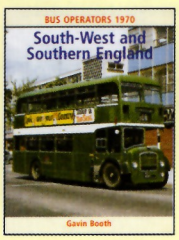

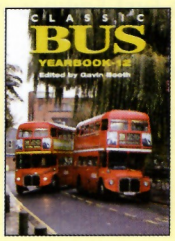

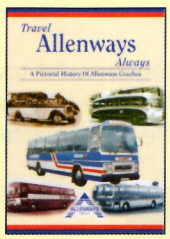

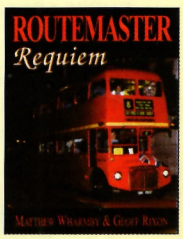

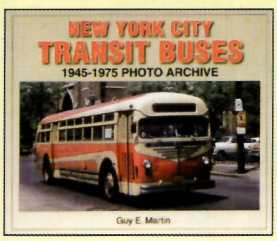

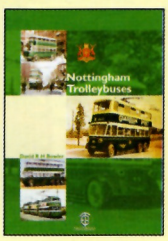

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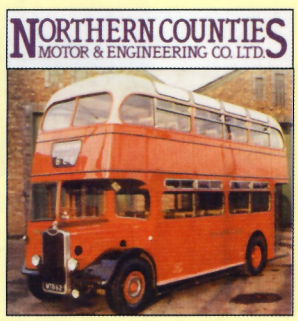

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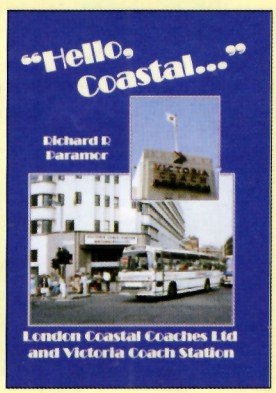

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